PANIC AT THE DISCO BEG FOR A GROUPIE AMBUSH

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TAYLOR SWIFT

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TECH SPECIAL

TOTAL AUDIO IMMERSION: BEST NEW MP3 PLAYERS

PAVEMENT REUNION?
SEE PAGE 36

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MICHAEL JACKSON

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Badu, moments before revealing some *weird-looking* hat-head.

MARC BAPTISTE.

1.
ERYKAH BADU
"THE HEALER"
UNIVERSAL MOTOWN
Our favorite batty R&B beauty soars gorgeously off the deep end yet again—this time proclaiming that "hip-hop is bigger than religion." Amen!

2.
RYAN LESLIE FEAT. KANYE WEST
"DIAMOND GIRL" (REMIX)
NEXTSELECTION
A feather-puffing marriage proposal, set to one deliciously squelchy electronic beat.

3.
DAME SHIRLEY BASSEY
"GET THE PARTY STARTED"
LOCK STOCK AND BARREL
Pink's girls'-night-out hit gets a brassy treatment from the "Diamonds Are Forever" dame. And it works! Daniel Craig, we see you!

4.
N.E.R.D
"EVERYBODY NOSE"
VIRGIN/STAR TRAK
Pharrell and Co. serenade yayo-sniffin' ladies over some raucous jazz-hop (cribbed from a Panamanian dance-music group).

5.
JODY BREEZE FEAT. RICK ROSS
"WORK"
[ONLINE]
A Georgia tough and a Miami heavy serve up a menacingly lo-fi bragfest.

6.
CLIPSE
"20K MONEY MAKING BROTHERS ON THE CORNER"
RE-UP GANG
Rap heroes compare their slinging prowess to yoga, pole-vaulting and golf—this one goes out to all you Olympian New Age PGA hustlas!

7.
KANYE WEST FEAT. R. KELLY
"FLASHING LIGHTS" (REMIX)
[ONLINE]
The Pied Piper hijacks 'Ye's stroboscopic breakup jam with his trademark madman suavity.

8.
EXCEPTER
"BURGERS"
PAW TRACKS
NYC odd squad celebrates fast food, cheap synthesizers, spooky kiddie voices and, beneath it all, a catchy bass groove.

9.
RADIOHEAD
"BANGERS AND MASH"
[ONLINE]
From the *In Rainbows* bonus disc, a fuzzed-out hard-rocker.

10.
HERCULES AND LOVE AFFAIR
"BLIND"
DFA/EMI
Artsy-ass Brooklynites deliver some unstoppable disco, featuring trilly voiced androgyne Antony.

11.
GNARLS BARKLEY
"RUN"
DOWNTOWN/ATLANTIC
Another up-tempo freakout—this time about monsters and beasties—from the odd couple of disco-soul gangsta rock.

12.
TEYANA TAYLOR
"GOOGLE ME"
STAR TRAK/INTERSCOPE
Pharrell's new rap kitten has a message for all who doubt her star status: Check the Web, bitches!

13.
FOALS
"MATHLETICS"
SUB POP
Oxford dance-punk smarties debut with a jam for all you long-division lovers.

14.
ADAM GREEN
"TROPICAL ISLAND"
ROUGH TRADE
A chillaxin' Caribbean idyll from indie rock's oddball lounge lizard.

15.
PANIC AT THE DISCO
"NINE IN THE AFTERNOON"
DECAYDANCE/FUELED BY RAMEN
Cuddly emo boys get a Beatles makeover and sing about lazing the day away—possibly on drugs.

16.
COUNTING CROWS
"YOU CAN'T COUNT ON ME"
GEFFEN
A mellow acoustic ballad with an important moral—never trust a white dude with dreads!

17.
THE KOOKS
"ALWAYS WHERE I NEED TO BE"
ASTRALWERKS
The Brighton crew bop their way through this celebration of ... punctuality, or something.

18.
THE MOUNTAIN GOATS
"SEPTEMBER 15 1983"
4AD
An indie warbler offers up the groovin'-est song ever about former Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin.

19.
CAT POWER
"I FEEL"
MATADOR
From the deluxe edition of her new album, Chan Marshall covers a song by Lil Wayne's Hot Boys. Gloomily gangsta!

20.
JAY-Z
"AIN'T I"
[ONLINE]
Jigga brags about his $1,000 sneakers and the Basquiats in his foyer on this recently unearthed Timbaland banger.

WATCH THESE

YOUTUBE
UPSIDE-DOWN TOMMY LEE DRUM SOLO LIVE IN TACOMA
The Mötley Crüe drummer's revolving drum cage is a well-known example of stadium-rock excess, but the highlight of this 1987 clip is his totally stoked running commentary: "Tacoma! ... You sound like you're doin' choice!"

TV
CAN YOU DUET
From "Islands in the Stream" to "You're the Reason Our Kids Are Ugly," country music has a rich history of duets. CMT's new talent show, from the producers of *American Idol*, aims to discover the next great Nashville duo. Premieres April 14.

DVD
ROXY MUSIC THE THRILL OF IT ALL
VIRGIN/EMI
If art-rock bands were judged solely on the sparkliness (or bright pinkness) of their outfits, Roxy Music would win every time. Check out the nearly 40 music videos, TV appearances and live performances on this disc for ample proof.

Now that's what we call a cucumber wrapped in foil!

PLAY THESE

BULLY: SCHOLARSHIP EDITION
ROCKSTAR; XBOX 360, Wii
The controversial schoolyard stomper graduates to the Xbox 360 and Wii. Tackle challenges—including a new frog-dissection minigame—as you fight your way to the top of the social ladder at Bullworth Academy.

GOD OF WAR: CHAINS OF OLYMPUS
SCEA; PSP
It's a handheld clash of the titans in this prequel to the PS2 hit *God of War*. You portray chrome-domed Cretian demigod Kratos, who dishes out a big fat Greek slaughterfest with his twin blades.

Bully: "Ouch, my pixels!"

SEE THESE

TOKYO POLICE CLUB
Smart-ass Canuck indie rockers whose MySpace page shouts out Mark Rothko and Robert Longo—but their show aims straight for the hips. In San Francisco (3/24), Houston (3/31) and Miami (4/4). Unconfirmed opening acts include Osaka Fire Brigade and Inazawa Volunteer EMTs.

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN AND THE E STREET BAND
The Boss hits the road with nine of his favorite friends, perhaps hoping for a chance to spy girls wearing their summer clothes a couple of months early. Catch him in Cincinnati (3/22), Portland, Oregon (3/28) and Anaheim (4/7).

Tokyo Police Club, also members of the Marvel Comics Fan Club.

SPIN THESE

1 BLOOD ON THE WALL LIFERZ
THE SOCIAL REGISTRY
This Yeah Yeah Yeahs–endorsed Brooklyn noise trio put their own scrappy, screechy take on '90s alt-rock, lovesick balladeering and power pop.

2 MICHAEL JACKSON THRILLER
EPIC/LEGACY
Reissued after 25 years, this blockbuster returns toting five remixes—ranging from hot (Akon takes on "Wanna Be Startin' Somethin'") to *what?!* (Fergie vs. "Beat It")—and a video-stuffed DVD.

3 LOS CAMPESINOS! HOLD ON NOW, YOUNGSTER ...
WICHITA/ARTS & CRAFTS
Seven overcaffeinated Welsh lads and lasses treat the orchestra room like it's a Gymboree, making one sunny racket.

ROXY MUSIC: COURTESY EMI; TOKYO POLICE CLUB: DANIEL BOUD/RETNA.

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FEATURES

50) TAYLOR SWIFT
Double-platinum at just 18, country's newest superstar is the anti-Britney: She writes her own (incredibly catchy) songs, thinks her parents are "the coolest" and would never dream of leaving the house without underwear on. Fortunately, she's not above exacting revenge on her ex-boyfriends in song.

56) THE 20 BIGGEST RECORD-COMPANY SCREWUPS EVER
From passing on the Beatles to sinking $13 million (so far) into Guns N' Roses' *Chinese Democracy*—it's our list of the most boneheaded moves in the history of the music industry.

62) BEATLE BOB
For the past 11 years, he's attended more than 5,000 live shows, jumping onstage with bands like Franz Ferdinand and gaining nationwide notoriety for his arrhythmic dance moves. Meet rock's weirdest, most obsessive fan.

68) TECH SPECIAL
Shiny-new-gizmo alert! Our guide to the season's best MP3 players and music phones.

"MY EX MADE THE UNFORTUNATE ERROR OF CHEATING ON A SONGWRITER." 50

TOP: ALFREDO COSTANELLA; JEANS: J BRAND; SHOES: BEBE; BRACELET: CURVE; RING: BUCHIC.

> Annoy your boss: Watch music videos at Blender.com.

Photograph by **SHERYL NIELDS**

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Radiohead: crafty numerologists?

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168 hours with the emo heartthrobs

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How Warren Zevon and pals perfected the tale of a stylish, Chinese-food-craving lycanthrope

100) WHO DOES ADAM DURITZ THINK HE IS?
The Counting Crows singer insists he's "lousy" at being a rock star—but exceptional at pleasuring the ladies.

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On the cover
TAYLOR SWIFT
Photograph by
SHERYL NIELDS

Styling: Jenny Ricker for The Wall Group. Hair and makeup: Sandi Spika. Tank: Collection K. Vest: Chloe Sevigny for Opening Ceremony. Leggings: Kova and T. Bangles: Phillip Crangi. Cuff: Erikson Beamon.

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JOHN CLARK.

LE JEAN DE
MARITHÉ + FRANÇOIS GIRBAUD

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YOU'VE GOT MAIL

BECAUSE SHARING IS CARING ...

Trick Me Baby, One More Time

My first reaction upon seeing your Britney Spears cover ("The Road to Ruin," March): *Damn, girl went and got herself back into shape!* Just when I thought it was safe to lust after Britney again, I read the note about the cover being a photo illustration. That was one very cruel trick, *Blender*.

Nervousnight999, Ithaca, NY

Psych! Glad to hear our continuing-ed Photoshop course paid off.

Leave Britney Alone!

In the immortal words of that femmy dude on YouTube: Leave Britney alone! It's obvious Brit didn't want to talk to you guys, so why did you have to go and write about her anyway? Maybe if we all gave her some space, she could get her shit back together.

P. Arkens, Hartford, CT

Wayne's World

When I saw that you'd awarded Lil Wayne the title of Best Rock Star Alive ("The Best List 2008," March), I was skeptical—the man's a rapper, not a rock star. But after reading about all his crazy exploits—from toting a Glock that his mom bought him to getting shot by a groupie—I must admit, he does rock harder than 99 percent of so-called rock stars out there. Take that, Coldplay guy!

Flux_capacitor, Washington, D.C.

Meshugunah for Meshuggah

Finally, real metal gets the attention it deserves in the pages of *Blender*. I couldn't agree more with the winner of your Best Heavy Metal Drummer competition (March), Tomas Haake of Meshuggah. Watching Haake just go off behind the kit on Meshuggah's Catch Thirtythree Tour in 2005 is one of my fondest musical memories.

Tim.Rawker, Sparks, NV

(Really) Southern-Rock Fan

As a onetime attendee of IceStock ("The Best List 2008"), the annual music festival held at McMurdo Station in the Antarctic, I can attest to just how awesome this event is. It was the most fun I had during my stay at the bottom of the Earth, aside from that time I got shit-faced and chased some penguins around.

Dustbustah222, Concord, NH

Drunkenly chasing penguins around? We'd love to hear Morgan Freeman narrate *that*.

Ain't Hip to Be Square

What you call "hipster hop"—acts like the Cool Kids, Kid Sister and Santogold—is the Best Rap Boomlet (March)? Give me a break, *Blender*. Who wants to listen to rhymes about BMX bikes and computer games? I'll take Young Jeezy over these "hip" geeks any old day.

Streets420, Chicago

Mojo Man

Thanks for naming Mojo Nixon's *The Loon in the Afternoon* as your Best Radio Show. I've been a fan of Mojo's since first hearing his still-relevant classic "Don Henley Must Die" back in the early '90s. Forget Howard Stern—Mojo's outrageous show is what makes Sirius worth paying for.

Doppler4000, Newport, RI

The Jaws Four

Great interview with my favorite Beatle, Ringo Starr ("Dear Superstar," March). I'd never heard the story he told you about the Beatles being offered millions to reunite for a show in which they'd go on after a battle between a man and a shark. I wish they'd accepted. How mind-blowingly awesome would that gig have been?

Meepster1000, Neenah, WI

It would have been particularly awesome if the shark had won.

Losing Face

Nice headline on the story about Michael Jackson's bandage-covered mug (Burner, March): FACE-LACKO JACKO—classic!

Whatchawant99, Geneva, IL

Whole Lotta Looting

In your "33 Things You Should Know About Led Zeppelin" (January/February), I kept looking for this one: They were thieves! Many of their "signature" songs were stolen, including most of the ones on their first album. To see what I mean, download these: "Dazed and Confused" (1966) by Jake Holmes, >>

IF POP STARS *WERE* DOGS ...

Send us a photo and tell us which music celebrity your pooch resembles. If we print it, you'll win Casio's 25th anniversary G-Shock watch.

AGUILERA: L. COHEN/WIREIMAGE.

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"Taurus" (1968) by Spirit and "Babe I'm Gonna Leave You" (1962) by Joan Baez.

A. Nealley, Glen Ridge, NJ

To Catch a Predator: Letters Edition

Thanks so much for covering pop punkers Paramore in your March issue ("Collect Call From ... "). I know she's young, but I have a huge crush on that redheaded hottie Hayley Williams. Too bad Hayley is a Jesus freak, because I'd totally be her paramour, if you know what I'm saying.

Birdman85, Gainesville, FL

And judging by your advanced wordplay skills, you must be quite a catch.

Whining About Winehouse

I've stood by quietly for months on end as you've run story after story on that no-talent train wreck Amy Winehouse. But after seeing the whole page of photos—13 in all!—you dedicated to her in your March issue (Burner) and that you awarded her beehive Best Hair, I can be silent no longer. I beg of you: Please, please, no more Amy Winehouse stories until she puts out a new album or just dies already.

Sherminator555, Monroe, LA

So You Think You Can Pole Dance

Natasha Bedingfield boasts that she's "a great pole dancer" in your Q&A with her (March). I say: Prove it! Why not incorporate some stripper moves in her next video? If she does, I promise to actually buy her album, not download it illegally.

Matthew G., Dale City, VA

No Love Lost

How pathetic is it that Lenny Kravitz ("Who Does Lenny Kravitz Think He Is?" March) drew himself wearing a LET LOVE RULE T-shirt in his self-portrait? Lenny, that hit of yours is almost 20 years old. Quit living in the past, dude!

Brookhaven14, Eugene, OR

Hate Thy Brothers

Blender, why must you waste precious space in your magazine reviewing a Jonas Brothers performance (Live, March)? In three years—tops—these manufactured sensations will have gone the way of another group of young brothers: Hanson. What ever happened to those pretty boys?

Seeker808, Tacoma, WA

Wait, what were you saying? Sorry, we were busy staring longingly at the *Tiger Beat* Jonas Brothers poster pinned to our cubicle wall. That Joe sure is dreamy.

LISTEN UP

Blender readers: We want to hear from you! So write in and tell us how you really feel.

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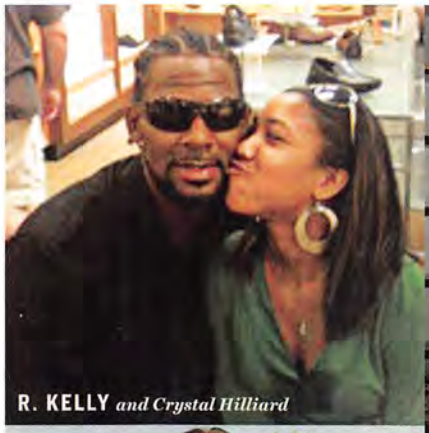
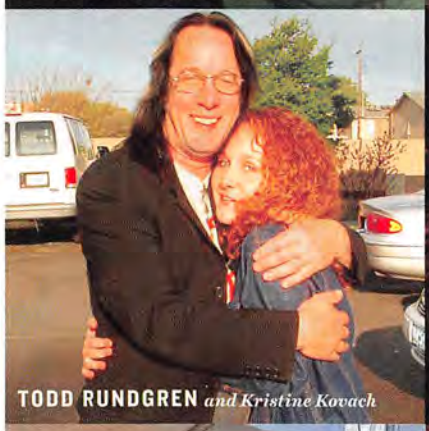
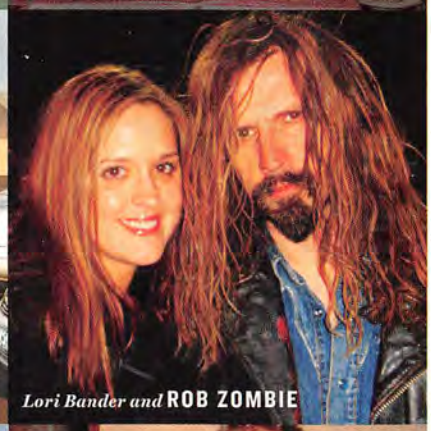


R. KELLY *and Crystal Hilliard*

M.I.A. *and Josie Westmoreland*



TODD RUNDGREN *and Kristine Kovach*



Lori Bander and **ROB ZOMBIE**

Kelly Fullerton and **USHER**

LINDSAY LOHAN *and Dave Reynolds*

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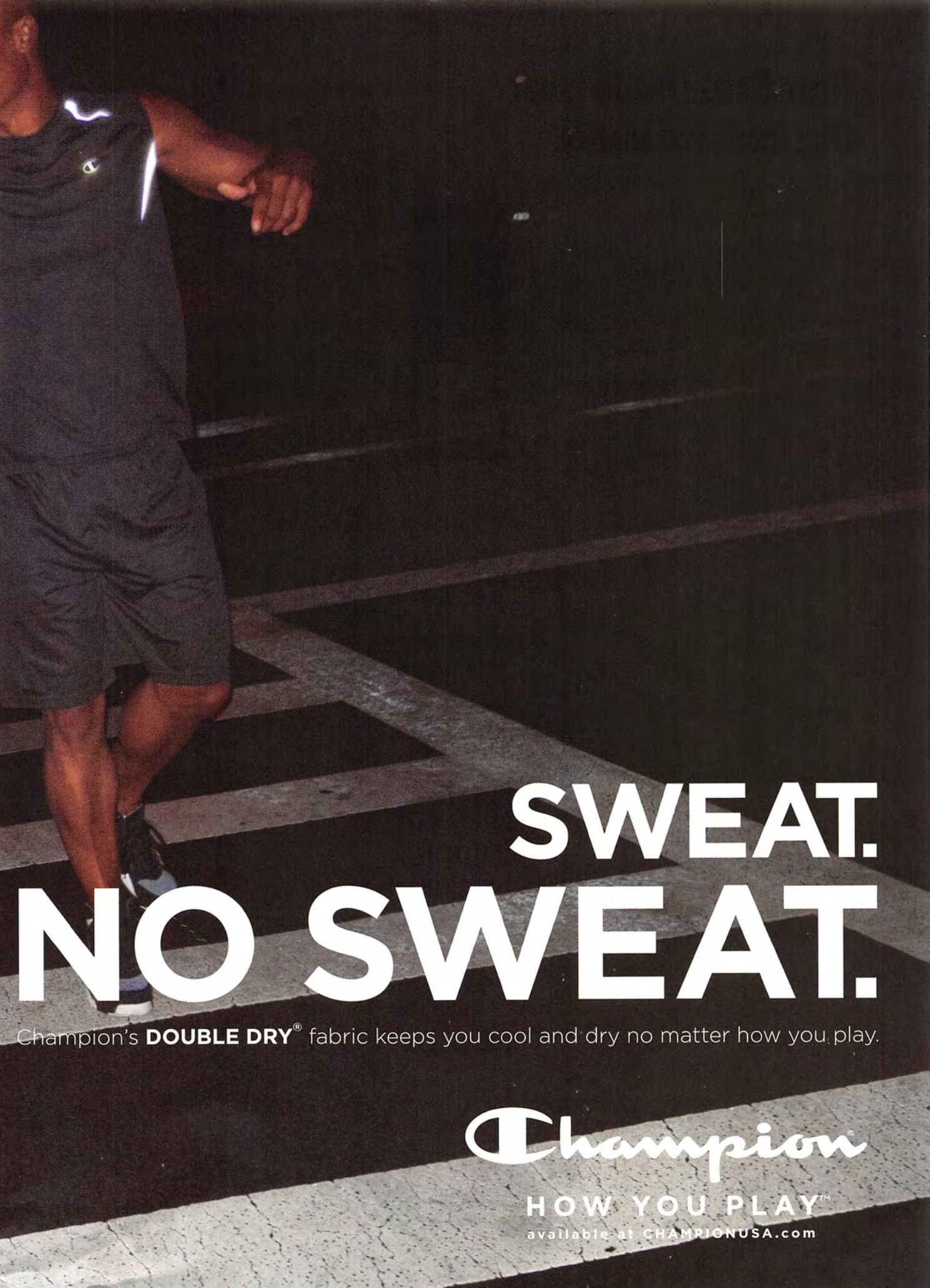
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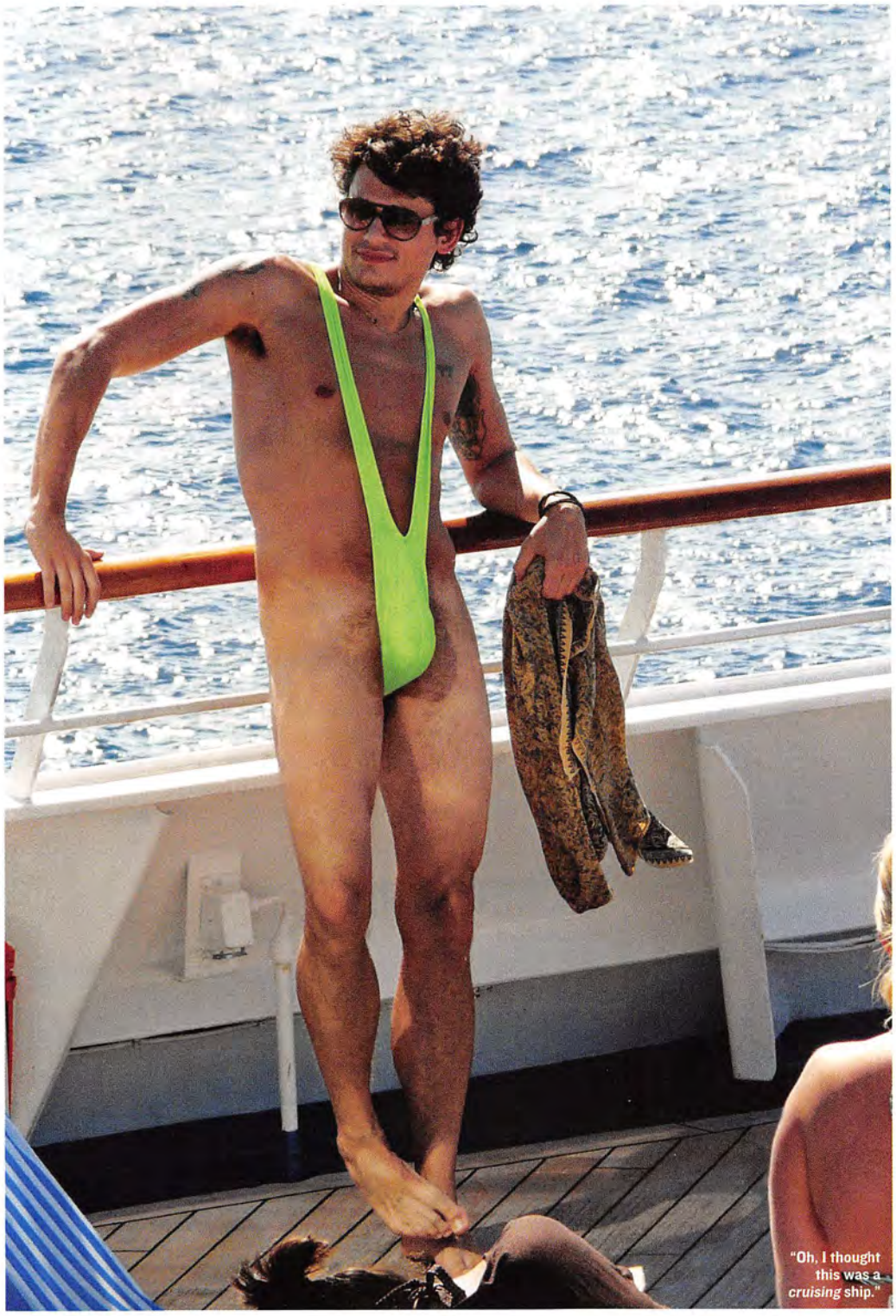


"Oh, I thought this was a *cruising* ship."

Kids, stay off the crack.

Sexy Time!

John Mayer *raids Borat's closet, hits the high seas*

BALLADEER AND PART-TIME comedian John Mayer took his act offshore recently and put *International Male* catalogue models to shame. Posing for nearly 3,000 guests on the Mayercraft Carrier—a three-day cruise making its maiden voyage—the body-proud pop crooner donned a Borat-esque neon-green man-thong, purchased on eBay. "We were hooting and hollering and egging him on," said passenger Erin Horgan. The past 72 hours have blown my mind."

The extravaganza set sail February 1 from Miami and made a stop in the Bahamas before unloading his loyal, mostly female, fans back in Miami. Seafarers enjoyed a casino, a 1980s-themed prom and concerts by a shirtless Mayer and others, like Colbie Caillat and DJ Logic.

Jon Coplon

KELLY O'DONNELL (2).

> For brand-new music and up-to-the-second news, visit the *Blender* blog at Blender.com.

At the lost and found: "Has anyone turned in a pair of shirt sleeves?"

Do You Rock?

DUFF McKAGAN

Does the former Guns N' Roses and current Velvet Revolver bassist indeed ... ROCK?

Ever trashed a hotel room?
Opening for the Cult in 1987, Slash and I knifed open the mattresses, pulled out the stuffing, threw the TV off the balcony and pissed everywhere.

Best rumor about yourself?
When I got sober in '94, I lost 50 pounds. People said I got lipo.

Biggest celeb's home you've ever gotten drunk in?
Arnold Schwarzenegger. We had Austrian schnapps and he outdrank me.

Brush with the law?
When Guns N' Roses were in Argentina, a news story said we brought in 60 grams of coke to sell. The *federales* came. It was scary. But they just wanted a payment—$30,000!

Worst rock & roll injury?
When Guns N' Roses were playing Sacramento in '92, I got hit in the temple with a bottle, and it knocked me out.

Ever been declared legally dead?
I've been declared legally stupid many times.

Ever get lucky on an airplane?
Yeah, but we had our own plane. That's cheating.

Stupidest thing you've ever eaten?
I ate my coat once in eighth grade.

If you were a superhero, what would your superpower be?
I tell my little girls I'm Captain Underpants, and our dog Buckley and I go out at night to fight crime. *Dave Hill*

Verdict

Schnapps with Arnie? That thing about Captain Underpants? Duff rocks above and beyond the call of duty!

OUT NOW *LIBERTAD* (RCA)

NEWS ROUNDUP

While **Amy Winehouse** recoups in rehab, her label, Universal Music, is thankful for the media frenzy surrounding her druggy exploits. "There's no getting away from the fact the coverage has kept Winehouse's profile at the highest level," a label vice president said. "Everyone is extremely happy with the amount of records we've sold, and a lot of it has been down to some amazing marketing opportunities when the artist wasn't available."

Mary J. Blige gave a non-denial denial about a report accusing her of ordering steroids. "I don't want to clear anything up, because I've been spoken about for so many years—rumors I'm pregnant, I'm a man, I'm this, I'm that. Why?" she said. "I am Mary, and that's that." Wyclef Jean, 50 Cent and Timbaland were also targeted in a probe by the Albany County, New York, district attorney.

WORD!

"YOU ARE BETTER OFF BEING HOMELESS THAN BEING ME."

Britney Spears to a stranger on the street

GEEK ALERT!

Conor Oberst in high school (left); 13 years older and several thousand wedgies later.

CONOR ROLL

Before his emo makeover, **CONOR OBERST** *of Bright Eyes was a model of old-school nerdiness*

CONOR OBERST, A songwriter known to explore bleak themes of isolation and self-doubt, is usually the epitome of hipster cool. However, recently unearthed photographs from his days at the Creighton Preparatory School in Omaha, Nebraska, suggest the 28-year-old Bright Eyes singer had a sunnier, dorkier side.

In his 1995 yearbook photo, the short-haired, bespectacled high school freshman is 15 years old and proudly wearing a checked button-down shirt and a goofy smile. At the time the picture was taken, Oberst had already begun recording music that would be released by Saddle Creek, a label his brother cofounded in 1996. Later, he would tour alongside admiring legends like Bruce Springsteen, R.E.M. and Neil Young. Last April, Bright Eyes released *Cassadaga*—the title refers to a central-Florida community of spiritual healers and psychics that made a strong impression on Oberst during a 2006 visit. *Jon Coplon*

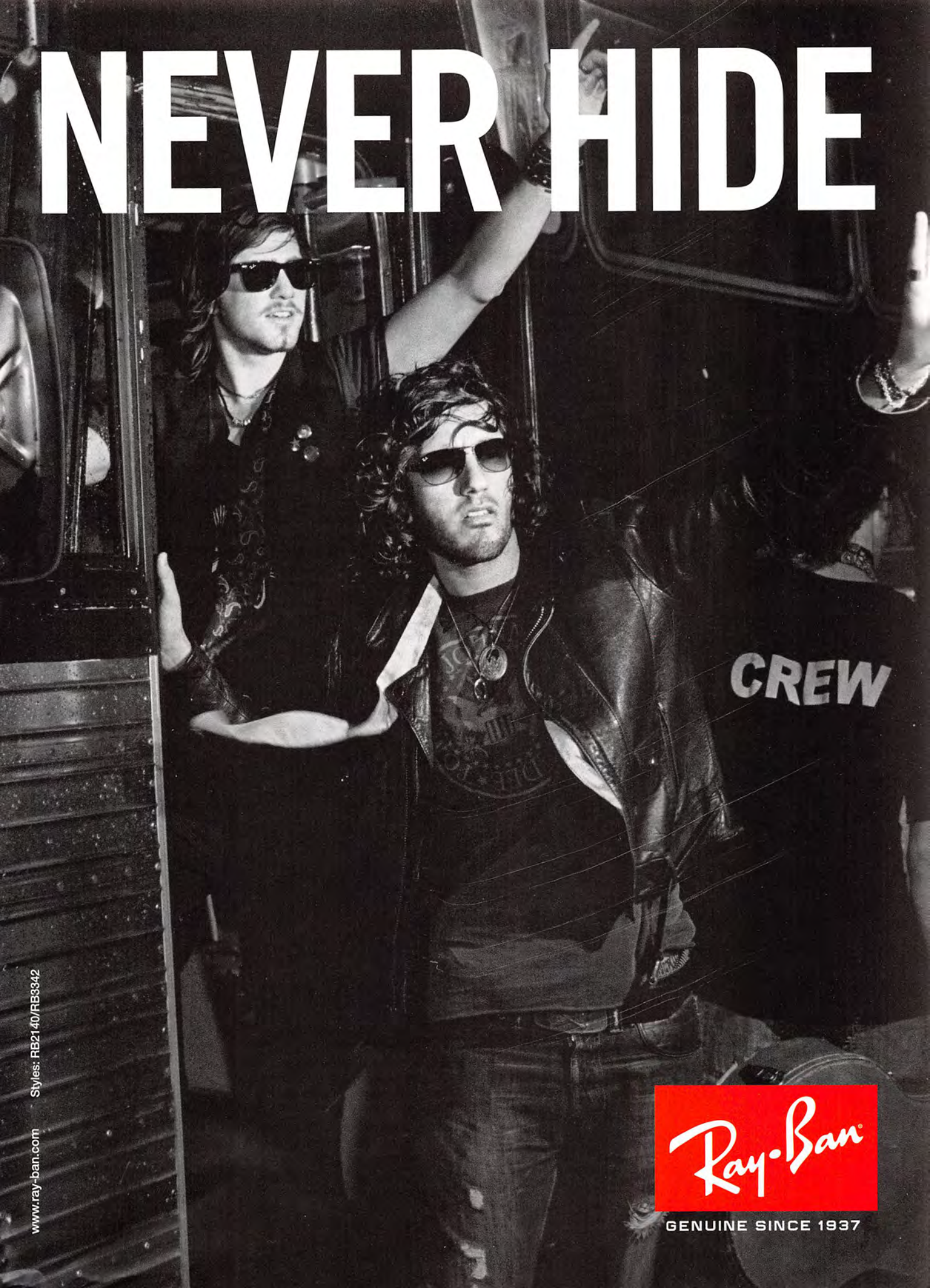
TICKET TO RIDE

NASA beams **BEATLES** *to music-loving space aliens*

NASA recently broadcast "Across the Universe"—a song recorded by the Beatles in 1968—in the direction of Polaris, the North Star. The track, written principally by John Lennon, was transmitted from a giant antenna in Madrid and is currently travelling 186,000 miles per second toward its intended destination 2.5 quadrillion miles away. Paul McCartney said of the cosmic undertaking: "Amazing! Send my love to the aliens." It will be 431 years before the song can be heard on the North Star. *Jon Coplon*

"Don't mind us, we're just tripping our balls off."

MCKAGAN: JOHN MCMURTRIE/RETNA UK; YOUNG OBERST: SETH POPPEL/YEARBOOK LIBRARY; OBERST: SAMIR HUSSEIN/GETTY IMAGES; BEATLES: FOX PHOTOS/GETTY IMAGES; SPEARS ILLUSTRATION: MORNING BREATH INC.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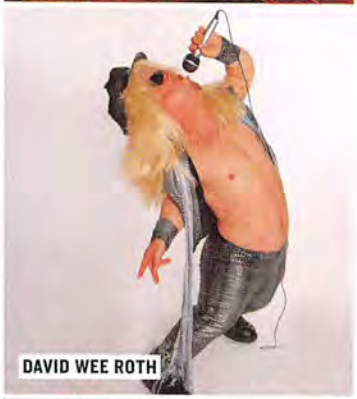
Pop-Star Must-Have

MINI ME'S

When celebs get their own little-person tribute act, they can finally put aside those self-worth issues

MINI BRITNEY SPEARS



DAVID WEE ROTH

MINI GENE SIMMONS

TEENY TURNER

NEWS ROUNDUP

A British man who walks his girlfriend on a leash is claiming goth discrimination against a bus company that refused to let the couple ride. **Tasha Maltby**, 19, and her fiancé, **Dani Graves**, 25, say the driver in West Yorkshire, England, told them, "We don't let freaks and dogs like you on." The bus line says the pair was denied because of safety concerns. "It could be dangerous if a driver had to brake sharply while Miss Maltby was wearing a leash," a company rep said.

Authorities in Compton, California, are attempting to ban **Suge Knight** from the crime-plagued Los Angeles suburb after police listed the rap mogul as a member of the street gang Mob Piru. "This is crazy," the Death Row Records cofounder said. "I'm a 42-year-old businessman, not a gang member."

WORD!

"I WAS LIKE, 'HOW WOULD PETE WENTZ GET INVOLVED?'"

Pete Wentz, when asked why he attended a Barack Obama event

PON DI SPASM!

SEAN PAUL's *music triggered girl's brain seizures*

Sean Paul and his victim (inset).

STACEY GAYLE, NOW 24, was at a barbeque several years ago when she first discovered that Sean Paul's hit single "Temperature" had a profound effect on her: It gave her violent brain seizures.

Whenever the dancehall-reggae track came on, Gayle would have epileptic episodes. "It was terrible," she says. "It didn't even have to be that loud." Gayle found that other hip-hop songs had the same convulsive effect. But "Temperature" was the most consistent instigator of her grand-mal seizures, which at worst would occur between four and ten times daily.

Doctors at New York's Long Island Jewish Hospital diagnosed Gayle with a rare type of epilepsy called musicogenic, in which the part of the brain that processes music overlaps with portions that trigger seizures. Although 3 million Americans suffer from epilepsy, there are only five people in the world known to have this particular affliction.

Late last year, Gayle underwent surgery to identify and remove the problematic region of her brain. The operation was apparently successful, as she has yet to experience a convulsion since. And how did she celebrate? By buying Sean Paul's newest album, *The Trinity*. "His music is awesome," she says. *Noel Boddie*

Weird Band Alert

BEARFORCE1

A fruitalicious man-band from Amsterdam

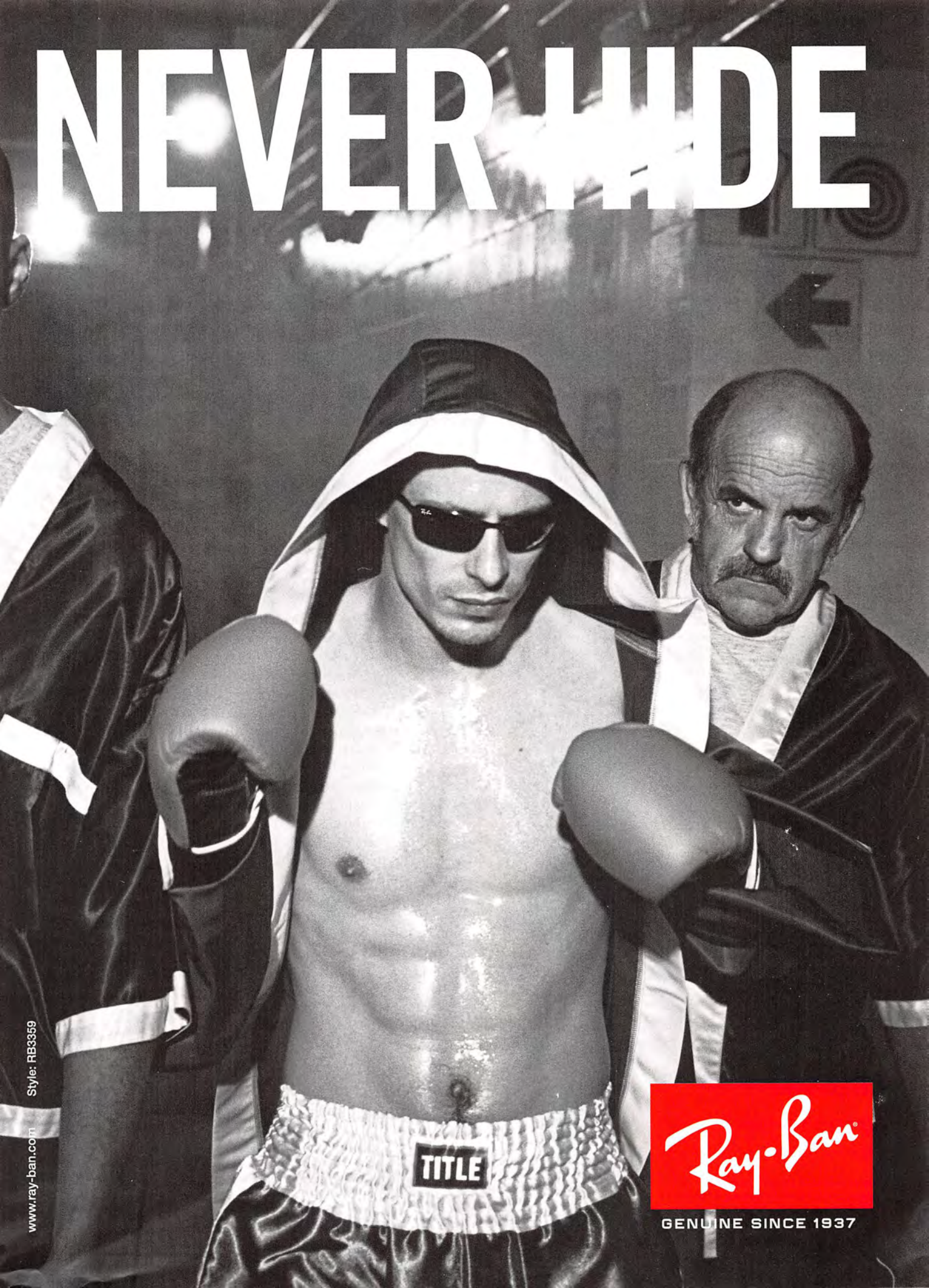
"We're esk-homos!"

Who are they? A fey foursome that adds lyrics (about how much they like cute boys) to sped-up disco medleys. They wear pastel-colored shirts or matching tanks and sport conspicuous goatees. In the choreography-heavy music video for "Bearforce1," they frolic naked in the ocean.

But aren't a couple of them a bit too skinny to be considered "bears"? Being a "bear," the Dutchmen say, has more to do with a "bear state of mind" than any outside appearance.

Oh, right. Is there at least an uplifting message behind all this? Yes. "Enjoy your life," says Bearforce1 member Peter Schoonheim, 50, who works as a prison counselor by day. "And be proud of what and who you are!" *Dave Hill*

MINI ME'S (FROM TOP): SPLASH NEWS/NEWSCOM; JEFF BEACHER'S MADHOUSE (3); PAUL: JASON MERRITT/FILMMAGIC; GAYLE: MARY MCLOUGHLIN/SPLASH NEWS; BEARFORCE1: OOF VERSCHUREN. ILLUSTRATION: MORNING BREATH INC.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Hannah Montana: 2-D.

When Will Your Favorite Pop Star Croak?

#46 MILEY CYRUS

Birth date	NOVEMBER 23, 1992
Current age	15
Death calculator starts at age	79

CATEGORY	YEARS ADDED/SUBTRACTED
Female (+4); born in Tennessee (-3); grew up on her family's farm (+2)	+3
Family ties: Close to two brothers, two sisters, mom and dad, Billy Ray Cyrus	+4
Sugar high: Overeating sweet snacks (one of her favorites is cookie dough; lives "on Gummi Bears") can lead to obesity or diabetes	-4
Spirituality: Both she and her parents are devout Christians ("I'm here in Hollywood because of faith and God's will")	+6
Lack of privacy: Paparazzi once chased her while she was bike-riding ("It got creepy")	-1
Secret fear: Arachnophobia	-1
Stress: Nail-biting habit indicates anxiety, raises risk for infectious diseases	-2
Pooch pals: Three dogs offer companionship	+2
Optimistic outlook: "You can't live a positive life with a negative mind"	+2
Aerobic exercise: Loves to run; hectic performance schedule keeps her cardio-strong	+2
Neurobic: Songwriter, actress, singer; enjoys cheerleading and English class	+4
Purity: She was said to be dating Nick Jonas, but she's keeping her virginity until marriage (+3); racy underwear pics on Internet (-1)	+2
Success: Stars in popular TV show; sold 2.5 million records last year; has a profitable merchandise line; sold out arena concert tour; made $3.5 million in 2007	+8
Estimated life expectancy	104
Projected year of death	2096

Gerontologist Dr. David J. Demko says: "Miley can add years by dumping her diet of sweets. Sugar may also serve as a gateway drug to other stimulants as she gets older."

NEWS ROUNDUP

A judge has denied **Foxy Brown**'s request to be freed from jail to tend to her deaf ear. The rapper, an inmate at Riker's Island prison in New York, asked to have her electronic hearing implant fixed at a Los Angeles clinic. Brown is doing time for a probation violation stemming from her 2004 attack on two nail-salon employees.

Fresh from her Broadway stint in *The Color Purple*, **Fantasia** looks to be making her next career goal a take-down of longtime nemesis **Keyshia Cole** in a vocal duel. The *American Idol* alumna called out Cole on a radio show, challenging her to a sing-off in which each would put up her own money and the winner would walk away with the cash.

Bill Cosby is coming out with a rap album, titled *State of Emergency*. The 70-year-old funnyman (who has a Ph.D. in education) is a longtime critic of hardcore rap and plans to explore issues such as proper parenting, teen pregnancy, drug abuse, black-on-black crime and the high school–dropout rate.

WORD!

"PEOPLE GO TO BARS TO GET DRUNK AND HAVE SEX. TO ME, THAT'S WHAT HELL IS LIKE."
CLAY AIKEN

"Will someone get up and fix the reception on the bassist already?"

In the Studio

"DAMN SIMPLE"

FRANZ FERDINAND *go for a "dry sound" à la "'70s Ike and Tina records" for their third album*

RECORDING AND TOURING two albums in two years meant Franz Ferdinand needed a break. "We were exhausting ourselves," frontman Alex Kapranos says. But after a hiatus, during which members pursued projects like curating a South American art show and filming a documentary, the Scottish dance-rock playboys reunited to record three discs' worth of material for their follow-up to 2005's *You Could Have It So Much Better*. "We're choosing songs almost like it's a greatest-hits album," Kapranos says. "There are 11 that we've been gigging, and you see an immediate reaction. It's like putting an electrode in the crowd."

Like other Franz records, there'll be lit-influenced tracks, such as "New Thrill," which is based on a passage from Truman Capote's *In Cold Blood*, as well as "visceral," synth-heavy songs like "Turn It On." "It's going to be a dance record, but not electronica," Kapranos says. "It's based around the kick drum and the bass."

The studio itself—"a '50s-era abandoned town hall in Glasgow," he says—has a lot to do with the band's productivity: "It's both sinister and comfortable, like our own secret lair." For the recording, they are opting to play live, using as few mics and effects as possible. "We're keeping it damn simple, a very dry sound, like those early-'70s Ike and Tina records," Kapranos says. "It's something that a lot of bands don't do, making sure shit isn't too chopped up. Sometimes it's a little sloppier, but it gets the best feel."

Dan Reilly

All About Our Album

PRODUCER Brian Higgins

STUDIO Their personal studio

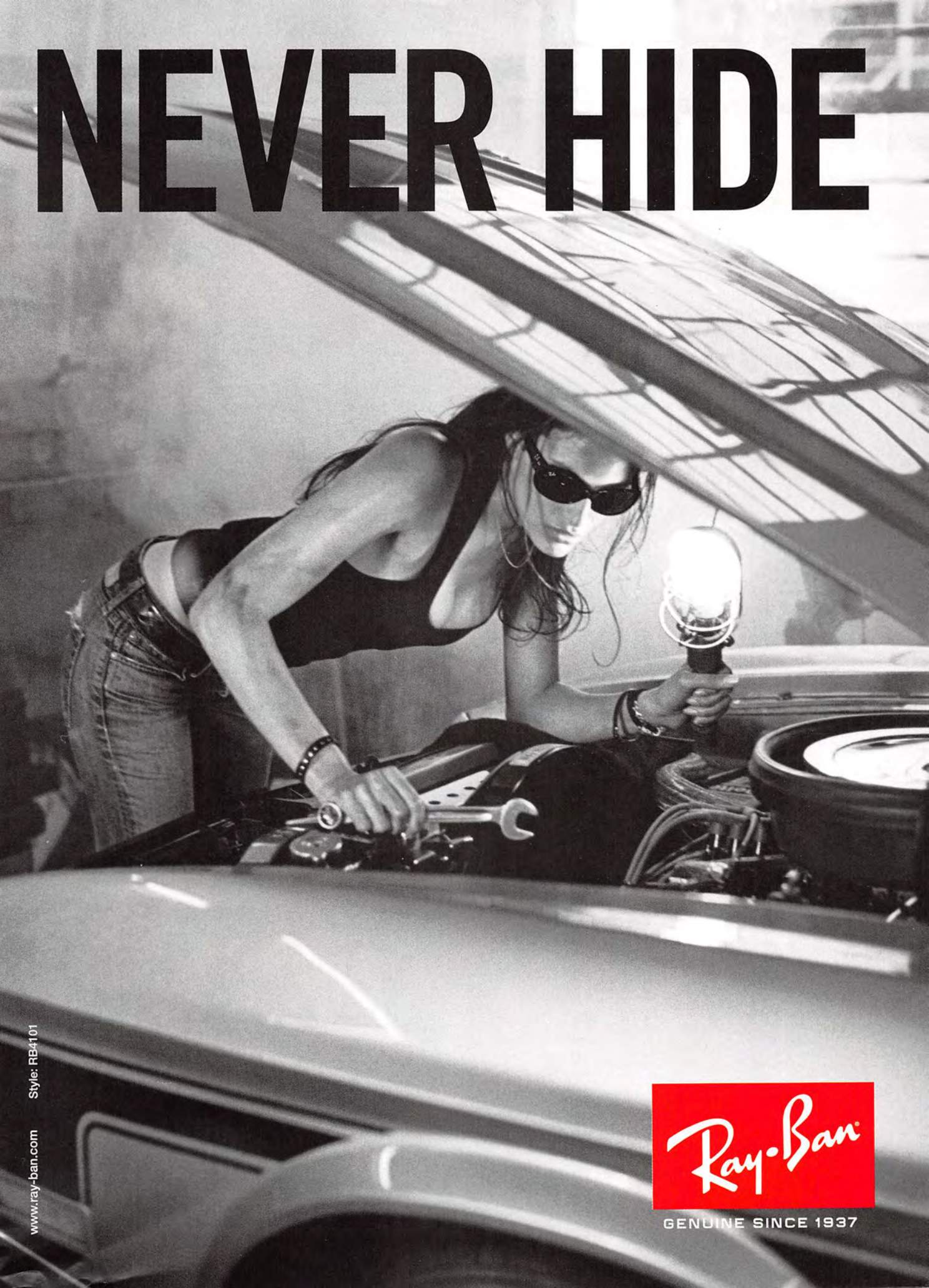
LAST ALBUM *You Could Have It So Much Better*, 2005

NEW ALBUM Untitled, due summer

Also in the Studio

Bar-room rockers the **HOLD STEADY** are recording their follow-up to 2006's *Boys and Girls in America* with producer John Agnello in New Jersey, due later this year ... **GYM CLASS HEROES** are working on their second album with Cool and Dre (50 Cent, the Game) and Patrick Stump (Fall Out Boy), due late summer ... Blues-rock sorceress **PJ HARVEY** and her producer, John Parish, are collaborating on their second disc together, *Dance Hall at Louse Point*, due late 2008.

CYRUS: ARMANDO GALLO/RETNA; FRANZ FERDINAND: COURTESY FRANZ FERDINAND; HARVEY: RAHAV SEGEV/RETNA; AIKEN ILLUSTRATION: MORNING BREATH INC.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Long before his battle with Ares, Kratos was a servant to the Gods. Ordered deep into the underworld, the Ghost of Sparta faced an impossible choice: Redeem himself or save the ancient world from eternal darkness.

"9 out of 10. Reaches legendary heights."
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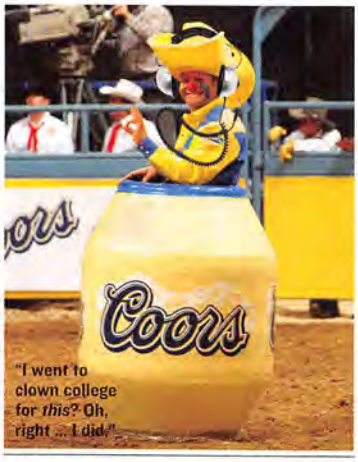


"I went to clown college for *this*? Oh, right ... I did."

Whistle While You Work

TROY LERWILL

The hard-working rodeo clown from Utah shares his ultimate play list for taunting bulls and pulling off wacky stunts

"THE STAR-SPANGLED BANNER"

"Hearing the National Anthem at the start of the rodeo reminds me to be thankful that I am able to entertain the crowds with my goofy job. It just calms me. I get more nervous putting my makeup on than fighting the bulls. The scariest part is doing comedy in front of 8,000 people."

"REAL WILD CHILD (WILD ONE)"
CHRISTOPHER OTCASEK

"My rodeo act is called the Wild Child. I do a specialty comedy motorcycle act that results in jumping my trailer and my pickup truck. This song is played while I do it, but I can't even hear it because I have a helmet on. But the crowd can, so they're in tune with what's going on."

"SLOW RIDE"
FOGHAT

"'Slow Ride' gets me going! This is another song played during my motorcycle deal. My heart starts pounding pretty good. The jump is about 60-feet long and around 20 or 22 feet in the air. I go up an aluminum ramp on the back of my trailer, and there's no landing ramp. It's a flat landing."

"SWEET HOME ALABAMA"
LYNYRD SKYNYRD

"It's my job to fill in dead time between the rodeo action with jokes or whatever. Rodeo is a family sport, so the jokes are good-natured, like poking fun at rednecks—but no fat-lady jokes. Some clowns do them, but they give us all a bad name. This song will come on, and I'll ask, 'Are there any rednecks in the house?' Down South, shit, everybody hollers."

NEWS ROUNDUP

Joss Stone's Yankee-sounding speaking voice has become the object of ridicule in her native England, but the soul singer seems unfazed. "I don't give a fuck if people have a problem with my accent," she said.

Busta Rhymes was sentenced to three years probation and 10 days community service after pleading guilty in New York to assaulting his former driver and a fan last year. The rapper was also fined $1,250 for DWI and driving with a suspended license. "I believe in the system," he said as he left the courtroom.

Michael Jackson reportedly fired his nanny Grace Rwaramba because she failed to stay healthy. "She's sick, and Michael hates germs," said a source. Jackson and his children (who have been photographed without blankets over their heads) are currently living at the Palms Casino Resort in Las Vegas, where the singer is recording a new album.

WORD!

"BE LEERY OF THE FREE GIFT BAG."
Kanye West

INSANE IN THE WAYNE!

LIL WAYNE *is arrested for drug cornucopia, again*

Lil Wayne, pissed he's going to miss tonight's episode of *Gossip Girl*

WHAT IS GOING on in Lil Wayne's world? Arizona police arrested the New Orleans rapper in January after stopping his tour bus and discovering nearly four ounces of marijuana, more than one ounce of cocaine, 41 grams of Ecstasy, drug paraphernalia, $22,000 in cash and a .40-caliber pistol that was registered to Wayne in Florida.

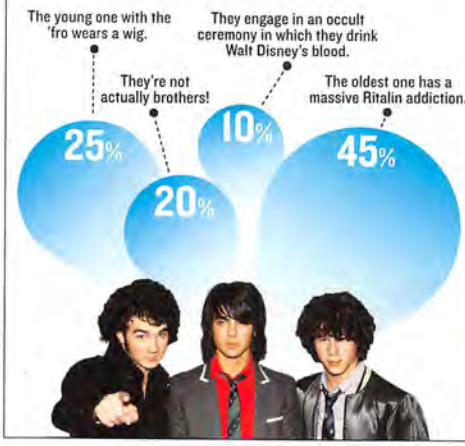
He was released after posting bail—but several nights later, onstage in Virginia, Wayne, 25, hurled his jacket at his manager, Cortez Bryant. "To the ones that ain't gonna be with me no more—die," Wayne announced. Rumors swirled that Bryant had pinned the contraband on Wayne, but a spokesperson denies this: "Cortez didn't snitch," Kia Selby, Wayne's publicist, told *Blender*. "They're best friends, so there's bound to be tension, but they've made up."

Selby added that Wayne—whose *Tha Carter III* LP is set for a May release—drew the charge because he was the biggest name on the bus. This was his third legal run-in in six months; he was arrested for gun possession in New York and for a felony fugitive charge in Idaho. "Things will be OK," Selby said. "Wayne just does crazy things sometimes." *Noel Boddie*

Blender's Burning Question

What will be the first Jonas Brothers scandal to break?

[SURVEY SAYS]



Reader wisdom

"YOU'D BE POPPIN' PILLS, TOO, IF YOU HAD TO TAMBO!"
RJABLOWSKI, JENKINTOWN, PA

Log on to Blender.com for the next Burning Question. One deserving reader will have his/her brilliant comment published in the magazine and win the Slacker Portable radio player.

HEADPHONES: RAINER HOLZ/ZEFA/CORBIS; LERWILL: PRCA PRORODEO PHOTO/MIKE COPEMAN; LIL WAYNE: THE SMOKING GUN; JONAS BROTHERS: JIM SPELLMAN/WIREIMAGE; WEST ILLUSTRATION: MORNING BREATH INC.

 "Nothin' to do and nowhere to go-o-oh, I wanna be sedated/Just get me to the airport, put me on a plane/Hurry, hurry, hurry, before I go insane."

From left: Dorian Dumont, Quentin Delafon and Michael Szpiner.

JOSH OLINS/CLM/TRUNKIMAGES.COM.

ALMOST FAMOUS

THE TEENAGERS

Three pervy Parisians with love songs straight out of *Penthouse Forum*

By **JOSH EELLS**

MEET THE HORNIEST band in indie rock. The Teenagers—a Paris-born, London-based trio—have conquered the blogosphere with their libidinous (yet oddly sweet) synth-pop ballads. For instance, "Starlett Johansson" is an NSFW song about bagging a certain American movie star. Says guitarist Dorian Dumont: "I'm lucky my mom does not speak English."

Dumont, 25, singer Quentin Delafon, 26, and bassist Michael Szpiner, 26, met in high school, bonding over a love of American trash culture—*Dirty Dancing*, Shannen Doherty, *Showgirls*. "USA movies have been shoved in our faces," Delafon says. "We had no choice but to embrace it." The friends spent a few years playing in various bands until Christmas 2005; on a lark, they got "a bit drunk" and created a MySpace profile for the Teenagers, a band that did not, technically speaking, exist. When, a few days later, they got a friend request from a girl named Nicole, they wrote a song about having sex with her ("Fuck Nicole").

Listening to their tales of hormone-fueled fondling and drunken one-night stands, you'd be forgiven for thinking the Teenagers were the greatest Casanovas the French school system ever produced. Truth is, it's mostly in their heads. "We are picturing the teenagehood we wanted to go through," Delafon says. "Our teenage years were a bit crappy—we were all losers struggling to get laid. In fact, there is only one song that is autobiographical ['Streets of Paris']. And it's the one where we get mugged." [BLENDER]

OUT NOW *Reality Check* (XL)

All About Us!

FAVORITE '80S MOVIE
"*The Goonies*. Everyone wants a friend like Sloth." (Szpiner)

FAMOUS FANS
"Kiefer Sutherland came to one of our gigs in London. It was before he went to jail." (Dumont)

CHEESE RECOMMENDATION
"Raclette—toasted, with potatoes and ham. It's really very good." (Dumont)

LET'S GO, CHARITY!

WITH PARIS ON THE HUMANITARIAN BANDWAGON—SHE'S THREATENED TO SAVE RWANDA—IS THERE ANY NEEDINESS LEFT? AS THIS DO-GOODING GUIDE SHOWS, THERE'S STILL PLENTY FOR PHOTO-OP-LOVING POP STARS

BY BEN MITCHELL
ILLUSTRATIONS BY
JOSH McKIBLE

YOU ARE **A FEROCIOUSLY PATRIOTIC MUSICIAN**, LIKE TOBY KEITH

YOUR CONCERNS
Anything that impinges on the American workingman's rights (and his firearms); oil supremacy

YOUR OPTIONS

Toby Keith, Ted Nugent and Kid Rock played for the troops in Iraq, but if that's too hands-on, contact Operation Helmet and buy soldiers proper headgear. Alternatively, check out Support Our Troops—their machine-gun charity shoot includes a lunch of wild game. Don't forget, nothing runs without oil, and that includes your truck, so dig deep.

YOUR BENEFITS **Not having to write another song about a warmongering xenophobe**

YOU ARE **A SOFT-HEARTED EMO GUY**, LIKE PETE WENTZ

YOUR CONCERNS
Protecting your wounded inner child while maintaining an adequate supply of makeup

YOUR OPTIONS

In April 2007, Fall Out Boy Wentz spent the night in a cardboard box during an event for Invisible Children, an initiative that cares for Ugandan children. Too extreme? Why not combine altruism with your fem makeup habits by getting behind M.A.C's Viva Glam; profits of the cosmetics benefit HIV/AIDS projects as far afield as China and the Caribbean.

YOUR BENEFITS **Offers backup blogging subjects to "haters!" and your last Hot Topic gig**

YOU ARE **A MIDDLE-AGED EX-JUNKIE ROCKER**, LIKE NIKKI SIXX

YOUR CONCERNS
The karmic opposite of your bawdy heyday: the war on drugs, the welfare of women and safe sex

YOUR OPTIONS

You've stuck a lot of Colombian product up your nose, so succor the war-torn country's kids by donating to the Colombianitos charity. Lend a hand to old porn pals via the Esther Fund, a religious group that helps them get out of the biz, or go to Japan where the annual Paradise TV AIDS telethon auctions off the privilege of touching a porn star's breasts.

YOUR BENEFITS **Refreshes your waning profile via means other than reality shows**

KEITH: CHARLES SYKES/REX USA; WENTZ: JORDAN STRAUSS/WIREIMAGE; SIXX: TODD WILLIAMSON/WIREIMAGE

 "Send them your heart/So they'll know that someone cares/And their lives will be stronger and free/As God has shown us by turning stone to bread."

YOU ARE **A HIGH-MAINTENANCE DIVA**, LIKE MARIAH CAREY

YOUR CONCERNS
The nagging suspicion that the less-fortunate suffer for you to look fabulous

YOUR OPTIONS

Bummed about Paris Hilton's shelved Rwandan mission? Clear your karma by helping the folks forced to toil in sweatshops, sewing your glitzy garments, via the U.S. Labor Education in the Americas Project. Or protect the rights of the Colombians and Ecuadorians who picked your massive backstage bouquets by donating to Fairness in Flowers.

YOUR BENEFITS **Plenty of red-carpet events to attend and thus strengthen your brand**

YOU ARE **A GLOBAL TOURING BEHEMOTH**, LIKE BONO

YOUR CONCERNS
Touring the world harms the environment, undermining your sanctimonious political grandstanding

YOUR OPTIONS

Eco-aware stadium artists have myriad choices, including the Polar Bear Nation, which offers, for the price of a T-shirt, relief for Arctic wildlife at risk from the climate crisis. Vacationing in the posh Maldives is a must, but did you know the islands are disappearing? Save the world, and your holiday, by giving to the Alliance for Climate Protection.

YOUR BENEFITS **From feeling righteous to a Nobel Peace Prize nomination, the sky's the limit**

YOU ARE **AN ICE-AHOLIC YOUNG RAPPER**, LIKE LIL WAYNE

YOUR CONCERNS
Bling guilt over the journey your gems may have taken from mine to neck/grill; not getting shot

YOUR OPTIONS

You're not Akon, who owns a South African diamond mine, and you want to think your love of ice doesn't screw up those exporting African regions. Sign up for the Diamond Empowerment Fund and pay for a kid's education. Since rap beefs may result in being brutally slain, donate to the Coalition to Stop Gun Violence and make a bullet-free body a reality.

YOUR BENEFITS **A clear conscience; freedom from constrictive Kevlar body armor**

YOU ARE **A BOOMER ROCK STAR**, LIKE DON HENLEY

YOUR CONCERNS
Lingering doubts your liberal convictions are waning now that you're no longer getting really high

YOUR OPTIONS

Causes that resonated with you back in the day still need help. The Kianh Foundation supports Vietnam's Hoi, an orphanage for children disabled by Agent Orange. The [Dr. Martin Luther] King Center in Atlanta propagates nonviolence. And to be on the safe side, give to Eric Clapton's Crossroads rehab in Antigua—you might need a tune-up soon.

YOUR BENEFITS **Assuages millionaire shame; Southeast Asian "fact-finding" trip**

CAREY: SOPHIA JONES/RETNA; BONO: RD/LEON/RETNA; LIL WAYNE: SOPHIA JONES/RETNA; HENLEY: RICK DIAMOND; WIREIMAGE.

THE 33 MOST WANTED SONGS IN AMERICA

Sensitive white boys have zilch on Rihanna this month

POSITION	TITLE	ARTIST	ALBUM/LABEL
1	"PLEASE DON'T STOP THE MUSIC"	RIHANNA	GOOD GIRL GONE BAD *DEF JAM*
2	"STOP AND STARE"	ONEREPUBLIC	DREAMING OUT LOUD *INTERSCOPE*
3	"WHAT ABOUT NOW"	DAUGHTRY	DAUGHTRY *RCA*
4	"FEEDBACK"	JANET JACKSON	DISCIPLINE *ISLAND DEF JAM*
5	"I FEEL IT ALL"	FEIST	THE REMINDER *CHERRYTREE/INTERSCOPE*
6	"READY FOR THE FLOOR"	HOT CHIP	MADE IN THE DARK *DFA/ASTRALWERKS*
7	"BLEEDING LOVE"	LEONA LEWIS	SPIRIT *J/SYCO MUSIC*
8	"SCREAM"	TIMBALAND FEAT. NICOLE SCHERZINGER AND KERI HILSON	SHOCK VALUE *BLACKGROUND/INTERSCOPE*
9	"GOOD LIFE"	KANYE WEST FEAT. T-PAIN	GRADUATION *ROC-A-FELLA/DEF JAM*
10	"BREAK THE ICE"	BRITNEY SPEARS	BLACKOUT *JIVE*
11	"WORK THAT"	MARY J. BLIGE	GROWING PAINS *MATRIARCH/GEFFEN*
12	"ALL-AMERICAN GIRL"	CARRIE UNDERWOOD	CARNIVAL RIDE *19/ARISTA NASHVILLE*
13	"SEXY LADIES"	JUSTIN TIMBERLAKE	FUTURESEX/ LOVESOUNDS *JIVE*
14	"SEE THESE BONES"	NADA SURF	LUCKY *BARSUK*
15	"LONG ROAD TO RUIN"	FOO FIGHTERS	ECHOES, SILENCE, PATIENCE & GRACE *RCA*
16	"IF I HAD EYES"	JACK JOHNSON	SLEEPING THROUGH THE STATIC *BRUSHFIRE*
17	"LIKE YOU'LL NEVER SEE ME AGAIN"	ALICIA KEYS	AS I AM *J*
18	"WON'T GO HOME WITHOUT YOU"	MAROON 5	IT WON'T BE SOON BEFORE LONG *A&M/OCTONE*
19	"UNDERNEATH"	ALANIS MORISSETTE	FLAVORS OF ENTANGLEMENT *WARNER BROS.*
20	"A-PUNK"	VAMPIRE WEEKEND	VAMPIRE WEEKEND *XL*
21	"FOUNDATIONS"	KATE NASH	MADE OF BRICKS *GEFFEN*
22	"WITH YOU"	CHRIS BROWN	EXCLUSIVE *JIVE*
23	"FALLING IN LOVE AT A COFFEE SHOP"	LANDON PIGG	*RCA*
24	"BABY GIRL, I'M A BLUR"	SAY ANYTHING	IN DEFENSE OF THE GENRE *J RECORDS*
25	"BEST DAYS"	MATT WHITE	BEST DAYS *GEFFEN*
26	"BIG CASINO"	JIMMY EAT WORLD	CHASE THIS LIGHT *INTERSCOPE*
27	"BOYS"	ASHLEE SIMPSON	BITTERSWEET WORLD *GEFFEN*
28	"SENSUAL SEDUCTION"	SNOOP DOGG	EGO TRIPPIN' *GEFFEN*
29	"LOVE IS FREE"	SHERYL CROW	DETOURS *A&M*
30	"WHEN I'M GONE"	SIMPLE PLAN	SIMPLE PLAN *ATLANTIC*
31	"HEY BABY"	BOW WOW & OMARION	FACE OFF *COLUMBIA*
32	"SECOND, MINUTE OR HOUR"	JACK PEÑATE	MATINÉE *XL*
33	"NO AIR"	JORDIN SPARKS FEAT. CHRIS BROWN	JORDIN SPARKS *JIVE*

WEEK ENDING // FEBRUARY 17, 2008

3

DAUGHTRY
"WHAT ABOUT NOW"
DAUGHTRY

As labels part with Chris Daughtry's fellow *Idol* alums en masse (sorry, Soul Patrollers), the bald-and-bearded neo-grungster just keeps putting out the hits. Toast to his continued good luck at his band's Las Vegas show, April 12.

HOW WE DID IT

aolmusic.com

The Most Wanted Songs chart is based on the number of audience searches, downloads and video plays on AOLmusic.com.

6

HOT CHIP
"READY FOR THE FLOOR"
MADE IN THE DARK

In the video for this dance-floor slayer, these Brits dress up as *Batman* villains—proving that success hasn't made them any less geeky. Check them out in early April when they tour the East Coast.

16

JACK JOHNSON
"IF I HAD EYES"
SLEEP THROUGH THE STATIC

Eco-rocker Jack Johnson warms up for his headlining slot at Coachella (April 25) with a series of mid- to late-March shows Down Under. Frankly, it all sounds like a convenient excuse for him to catch some gnarly waves on the Gold Coast.

19

ALANIS MORISSETTE
"UNDERNEATH"
FLAVORS OF ENTANGLEMENT

Here, the woman who explained the meaning of *irony* explains nothing less than the meaning of life. Enjoy a more thorough tutorial when she plays L.A. on March 16.

DAUGHTRY: DANNY CLINCH; HOT CHIP: BEVIS MARTIN AND CHARLIE YOULE; JOHNSON: THOMAS CAMPBELL; MORISSETTE: FRANK OCKENFELS.

Yo hey, I'm Paul, the original Dollar Menunaire. I'll admit it. I'm kind of a risk taker. Last week, I threw in this red t-shirt with a load of whites. A sock came out pink, but no pain, no gain. So I like a safe bet sometimes to, ya know, keep my balance. As luck would have it, there's the Dollar Menu. It's pretty much loaded with **choice choices.** There's no wrong answer in the whole bunch. So it keeps my yin balanced with my yang. So to speak.

Dollar Menu

i'm lovin' it.

At participating McDonald's. ©2008 McDonald's

"The salesman was right—this hairpiece *is* virtually undetectable."

STEPHEN MALKMUS

THE FRONTMAN OF '90S INDIE-ROCK HEROES **PAVEMENT** ON FEUDING WITH BILLY CORGAN, SPENDING TIME IN THE CLINK AND WHAT IT WOULD TAKE TO GET HIS OLD BAND BACK TOGETHER

BY MARK YARM

PHOTOGRAPH BY JOHN CLARK

BLENDER HAS ONLY just met Stephen Malkmus's mother, but it doesn't take long for us to win her over. "They're the magazine that named our album No. 1 on their indie-rock list," Malkmus informs his visiting mom, Mary, shortly after welcoming *Blender* into the Portland, Oregon, home he shares with his wife and two young kids. The 41-year-old singer-guitarist is referring to our recent feature declaring *Slanted and Enchanted*—the debut full-length from Pavement, the alt-legends Malkmus fronted from 1989 until their dissolution in 1999—the greatest indie-rock album ever. "We love *Blender*, then," says Mary Malkmus, beaming. "It's our favorite magazine."

And that's not Mrs. Malkmus's only source of maternal pride as of late: There are the matters of her son's new album, *Real Emotional Trash*, Malkmus's latest with his band of indie-scene vets the Jicks (now featuring ex-Sleater-Kinney drummer Janet Weiss); his work on the soundtrack to last year's Dylan biopic *I'm Not There* (that's his singing voice coming out of Cate Blanchett's mouth); and the November birth of his second daughter, Sunday.

We retreat to Malkmus's messy basement studio, where he prepares to face the questions submitted by *Blender* readers. He's not nervous in the least. "I've answered fans' questions before," he says. "In the '90s, I even had a Japanese magazine column called 'Stephen Malkmus Figures You Out.' I answered love questions from 16-year-old Japanese girls. It was fun, and I got paid like, 2,000 yen a month." Fortunately for *Blender*, Malkmus agreed to field your inquiries for free. >>

Blender named Pavement's _Slanted and Enchanted_ the No. 1 indie-rock album of all time. Were they right?
McDeets74, Collinsville, CT

The big problem with that list was the definition of *indie*—"records not released by major labels" would be my definition. The [major-label] Velvet Underground were No. 7, and if the Velvet Underground are going to be considered indie, they have to be No. 1. They're the band that influenced all the other groups on that list. Personally, I wouldn't put *Slanted and Enchanted* at No. 1—maybe Dinosaur Jr.'s *You're Living All Over Me* or Sonic Youth's *Sister* or the Butthole Surfers' *Psychic... Powerless... Another Man's Sac*. Pavement being in the Top 10 would've been enough.

As a teenager in California you spent some time in jail for walking on other people's roofs. What the hell were you doing walking on other people's roofs?
Piglib99, Austin, TX

I was about 16, and I was drinking beer with a friend before we went to a high school basketball game. We were peeing in the bushes by someone's house and we got this bright idea to walk on people's roofs, like they weren't going to hear us. The police caught us with beer in our car trunk. They kept us in jail for four hours, a "scared straight" type thing. It's not the only dumb thing I did. I was on probation for drinking at another high school, and I got kicked out for going to a party in the woods where people were taking mushrooms. I didn't take them, but some guy narc'd on me.

You worked as a security guard at the Whitney Museum in New York. What did you get to bust people for?
Vibraphone333, Anderson, IN

There wasn't much busting. There was a lot of "Please, don't touch." There were rumors that people were having sex in the bathrooms, and once someone wrote his girlfriend's name on a painting by Willem de Kooning—it turned out a rent-a-guard did it. When I worked as a night guard, I had the run of the place; I definitely thought about how you could take a lot of paintings all in one go.

Your wife, Jessica Jackson Hutchins, is a sculptor. Is there a marble Stephen Malkmus anywhere in your house?
Karen Kenner, Canton, OH

No, but she made some papier-mâché angel wings for me to wear in one of her art pieces. She filmed me wearing them, eating angel food cake. And I wasn't wearing a shirt. I know I'm supposed to be a sport for her art, but: 1) I don't like to get my picture taken, 2) I don't like to have my shirt off and 3) I'm wearing angel wings. I looked very sullen in the video, so I lost credit for that. Luckily, she didn't use it. >>

Malkmus passes a rather large kidney stone onstage in 1992.

Pavement in 1992, shortly before the feds busted their ice-chest-smuggling ring.

GAIL BUTENSKY. PREVIOUS SPREAD: STYLIST: GINGER JONES.

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Malkmus and the Jicks display the shower curtain they bought at the Liberace estate sale.

STEFAN M. PRAGER/BENDERNS/DETNA

Lemme get this straight: Pavement's bat-shit-crazy original drummer, Gary Young, handed out cabbage and cinnamon toast to fans at your gigs, passed out in the offices of Sony Records after demanding a $1 million deal *and* once pulled a gun on you?

Killdozer11, Fort Dodge, IA

He never pulled a gun on me—I would remember that—but everything else is true, I think. He did have a gun; he bought it in New Mexico just because he could, or something. He was just on one giant bender when we were on tour; he would do weird stuff. Once, he found a dead rabbit somewhere. He supposedly put it in my luggage and then decided to take it out. [Laughs.] I don't think that I was antagonizing him, but I was kind of a jerk back then sometimes.

Billy Corgan reportedly was so upset about the Pavement song "Range Life," in which you dis Smashing Pumpkins and Stone Temple Pilots, that he refused to play Lollapalooza '94 if you were on the bill. Have you and Billy settled that beef?

Jumper08, Spring Valley, NV

No, but I have a feeling that Billy's gotten over it. I made a game of it in the press, like there was some kind of war between us. I don't even know if the Lollapalooza story was true. The lyric wasn't even a particularly bad jab. Smashing Pumpkins and Stone Temple Pilots are both just names that I thought sounded really funny. I would like to apologize to them for making fun of their names. It's not like Pavement was the best name, anyway.

"I WOULD LIKE TO APOLOGIZE TO THE SMASHING PUMPKINS FOR MAKING FUN OF THEIR NAME."

I heard that Pavement were supposed to play on *Beverly Hills, 90210* but got kicked off the show after getting into a fight with Jason Priestley. Did you punch Brandon Walsh?

Jeff Tipp, Athens, GA

No, I was not involved in any of the violence on that show. I was a fan—you can't hit your

EX model shown. ©2007 American Honda Motor Co., Inc.

heroes. [Laughs.] We weren't ever even on that show and didn't fight anyone. We completely fabricated that for the English press.

Can you pinpoint the moment when you knew Pavement was over?
Sangha14, Chicago

Not really. It was sometime during the making of the last record. I was like, "Yeah, this is fun, but it's not quite fun enough to make this the only thing that we do in our lives." I didn't fully decide until after touring was done for that record. I think I communicated it pretty well, but there was confusion within the band because people didn't want to believe it. But it wasn't only me; I think other people in the band were ready for it, too.

The Pixies did it. The Police did it. When is Pavement going to join the reunion wave?
Gold.soundz, Orem, UT

With two kids and the Jicks, I can't see doing it anytime soon. I'm not against reunions. Maybe someone will talk some sense into me and tell me why we should do it, like if it's good for the legacy of the band. It could be really fun to play with those guys again.

Does anyone in the Jicks have a say, or do you just boss them around?
Dark_knight, Seattle

I wish. I'd love to see in print that I said, THEY JUST MY BITCHES. [Laughs.] But the truth is that the two ladies in the band, you can't push them around. I guess you can boss people around if you're an asshole or you've got a lot of money and your band's famous. You can just say, "You play this, or you're out. I've got 20 other people waiting in line to take your spot." But we're doing this because we like it.

Courtney Love once called you "the Grace Kelly of indie rock." What does that even mean?
Summerbabe, Groton, CT

She was living in Seattle then with these grunge people and their bad fashion and their bad teeth and bad breath. Pavement were comparatively preppy—dressing in cardigan sweaters and not dying our hair—and comparatively upper class. So she probably just thought, *Oh, they're graceful.*

I heard you're a big Scrabble player. I bet I could whup your ass at Scrabulous. Up for a game?
Ess-Dog85, Brockton, MA

If you think you can whup my ass, you probably can. I haven't played in three years. When I was playing a lot on tour with Pavement, I might have been able to take you down. Now there are new words, like *qi* and *za*, and who knows how many others.

What are the most and least indie-rock things you've ever done?
Carla H., Shreveport, LA

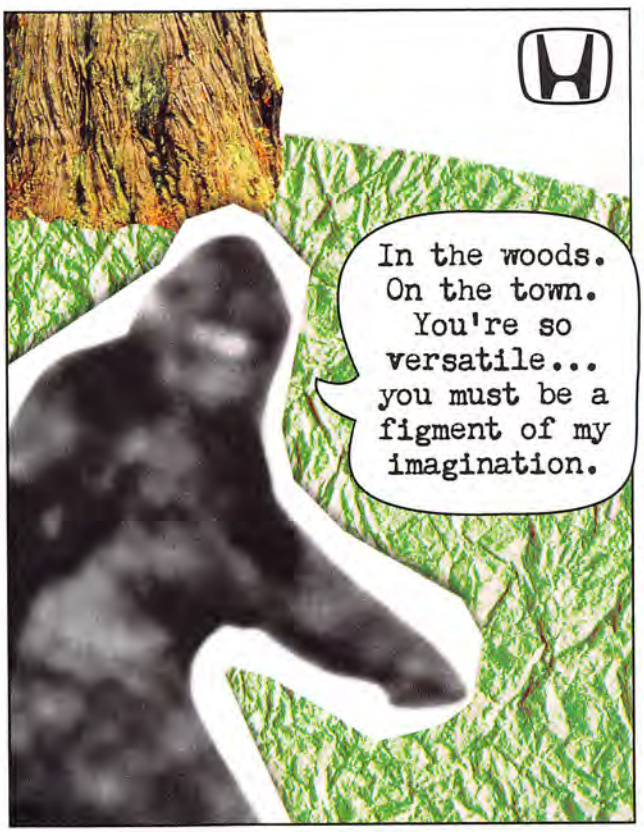
Most indie rock: living in Portland, being on [indie label] Drag City. Least indie rock: being into sporting events and overpriced restaurants and playing golf with my dad—stuff that's kind of bourgeois, bordering on Republican. I was vaguely pro-war at the start, thinking that Saddam was a horrible guy and being pro-Kurdish. Obviously, I don't think it was a good idea now.

You live in Portland, home to many other older indie rockers: Isaac Brock of Modest Mouse, James Mercer of the Shins and Britt Daniel of Spoon, to name a few. Do you guys have some sort of aging indie-rocker coffee klatch going on?
Mike Thompson, Providence, RI

I know Isaac the best of those people—he lives around the corner. But all their bands are constantly touring, so I wouldn't even see those guys. This group you're asking about sounds like the Masons or a Bohemian Grove–type conspiracy.

What's the most ridiculous interpretation of a Pavement song you've ever heard?
Oshkenee, Brooklyn, NY

I can't think of anything. Mostly people want to talk about my Geddy Lee mention ["Stereo"], the Smashing Pumpkins line and whether I'm saying *career* or *Korea* [in "Cut Your Hair"]. So two pop-cultural references and one dumb thing, which is kind of sad. I don't want to be remembered for lyrics. I want to be remembered for having a big nose that's a little crooked. And for being skinny. [BLENDER]



Radiohead (from left): Red, Orange, Yellow, Green, Blue, Indigo and Violet.

Is there really a hidden meaning behind Radiohead's *In Rainbows*?

Steven Chu, Oakland, CA

Not since Dorothy Gale followed the yellow brick road to the strains of *The Dark Side of the Moon* have music-conspiracy geeks done as much voodoo-theorizing as they have with *In Rainbows*. One camp claims the album is organized according to the Golden Ratio, a governing principle of classical architecture and Renaissance art. More plausible is the binary theory, which focuses on the plethora of ones and zeros surrounding *In Rainbows*: on sale in stores beginning 01/01, released to the Internet on 10/10, announced to the world 10 days earlier, comprising 10 tracks, with 10 letters in the title, preceded by 10 message-board posts that alluded to the Roman numeral X and to binary code. What's more, the working title of Radiohead's *OK Computer*—released 10 years prior—was *Zeros and Ones*. Also, if you get high and play the album backward, it will totally tell you who shot JFK.

Who was the first musician to go platinum?

Charlotte Paulson, Teaneck, NJ

Depends what you mean by "platinum." In 1976, the RIAA awarded its first platinum plaque (reserved for albums that ship at least a million copies) to the Eagles, for *Their Greatest Hits, 1971–1975*. R&B singer Johnnie Taylor also got one for his single "Disco Lady." But there had already been plenty of million-sellers by then. Singer Harry Belafonte broke the seven-digit barrier in 1956 with his album *Calypso* (featuring the hit "Day-O (The Banana Boat Song)"). And 14 years earlier, swing bandleader Glenn Miller's "Chattanooga Choo Choo" was the first single to move 1 million units.

But to find the very first artist to reach the million mark, you have to go back more than a century, to legendary Italian tenor Enrico Caruso. His 1902 recording of "Vesti la Giubba," an aria from the opera *Pagliacci*, is widely regarded as the first million-seller in history. More proof that the music business was way better before all you punk kids started downloading for free.

Caruso: "This next number is 'Chunky Drummer!'"

How do backward videos work?

Bev Lunsford, Grosse Point, MI

Time was, an artist making a backward video had to do exactly what you would imagine: perform the song from bottom to top, mouthing the lyrics in reverse.

For "Drop," a 1995 video by hip-hop group the Pharcyde, director Spike Jonze filmed them walking around L.A. and rapping their verses in reverse. Chris Martin spent weeks practicing his backward singing for Coldplay's "The Scientist." ("He was really excited to learn how," director Jamie Thraves said.) Same for Mute Math's "Typical" video, and that Dutch dude who does a backward "Stairway to Heaven" (check YouTube).

But technology has made the process a lot easier. For Linkin Park's "Bleed It Out" video, the huge crowd fight was filmed in reverse, but the band's performance was shot normally; director Joe Hahn used a computer program to weave each frame together piece by piece. "It was like a giant jigsaw puzzle," Hahn tells *Blender*, "except with a lot more math."

Sounds like a lot of work—for Hahn. Why didn't he just make frontmen Mike Shinoda and Chester Bennington learn the song in reverse? "I asked," he says. "They said no way."

ASK BLENDER

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From left: Jon Walker, Spencer Smith, Brendon Urie's belly button and Ryan Ross.

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PANIC AT THE DISCO

EACH MONTH, ONE LUCKY ROCK BAND PHONES BLENDER HQ FOR SEVEN DAYS STRAIGHT, JUST TO, YOU KNOW, SHARE. NOW ON THE LINE: EMO PINUPS **PANIC AT THE DISCO**

PHOTOGRAPHS BY JENNIFER ROCHOLL

Day 1

JANUARY 7, 1:19 P.M.

Guitarist Ryan Ross rings us from Las Vegas, where last night the band (finally) finished recording its soon-to-be-released second album.

"Man, it's nice to be done. We had a pretty relaxed last day: just overdubs and a few vocals. We've been recording at the Palms hotel, and when we finished they brought up this big dinner from the steak house—filet mignon, macaroni and cheese, shrimp as big as your face. It was definitely the most expensive meal I've ever had for free.

"Our record has basically consumed the past year of my life, so I was really looking forward to taking it easy today. But my girlfriend just flew in from New York—she's a Rockette—and she was like, 'OK, we need to move a bunch of stuff from the old house; we need to call the cable company; we need to get the heat back on ... ' They turned my heat off three weeks ago, because apparently I can't pay bills. I didn't care, but she's pretty insistent. Tonight's our last night home for a while—we leave tomorrow for L.A., then London for mixing. Maybe I'll trash a hotel room or something. Or maybe I'll just trash my own place—I don't really need another bill I won't pay."

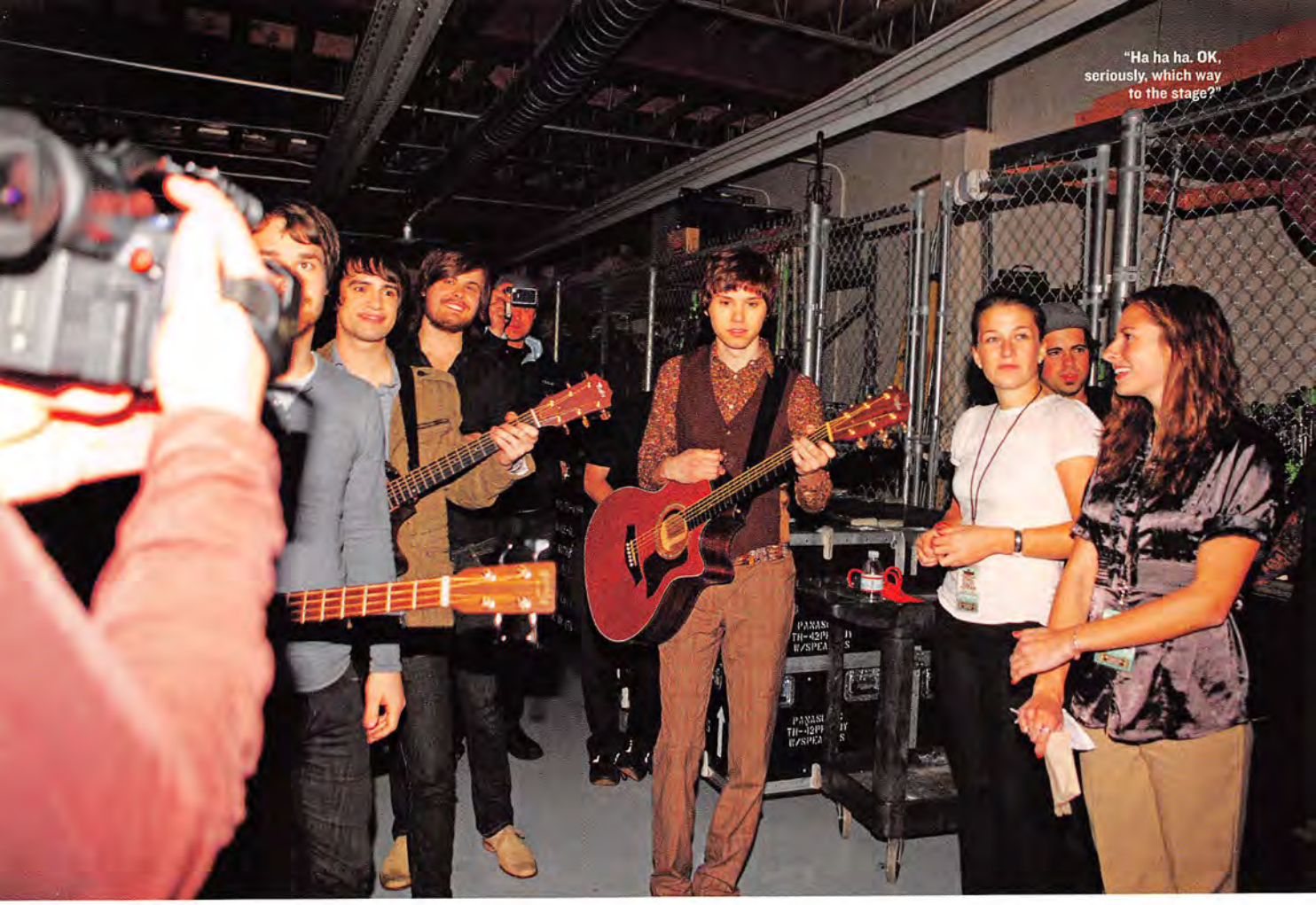
Day 2

JANUARY 8, 2:04 P.M.

Drummer Spencer Smith phones from his Vegas apartment, where he's packing for the band's two-week L.A./London adventure.

"Yesterday was a business day. We spent the whole afternoon at Ryan's condo, finalizing song titles, figuring out the track listing, approving publicity photos and choosing artwork. We also did interviews for this behind-the-scenes DVD we're making—kind of *Real World* confessional-booth style. We thought about going out, but we're leaving for two weeks—I just wanted to sit on the couch and watch TV with my girlfriend. Plus I just got this new puppy. His name's Boba Fett—he's a boxer.

"Right now I'm getting ready to go to the airport—doing laundry, folding shirts, making sure I have all the right adapters. My strategy is, I pack every pair of underwear and socks I own; if I run out, I just go buy more. You can get three pairs of socks at Wal-Mart for, like, five bucks. They're so cheap, I just wear 'em once and toss 'em. I read somewhere that Damon Dash never wears the same pair of sneakers twice. I'm just like that, except instead of $100 Nikes, it's Wal-Mart socks."



"Ha ha ha. OK, seriously, which way to the stage?"

Day 3

JANUARY 9, 2:58 P.M.

Singer Brendon Urie, taking a break from a long day of corporate shilling, dials us from Los Angeles.

"We're at Honda headquarters today, shooting a promo video for the Civic Tour we're headlining this spring. It's a wonderland of Elements and Odysseys and Accords. Earlier this morning we got to see the Civic Hybrid we designed. Well, I guess more 'decorated'—I took a year of auto shop, but I'm pretty sure you wouldn't want me designing your engine. We did the interior and the paint job. Now we're on our way to lunch in a sweet Honda minivan. I'm going to say the word *Honda* a few more times, because I get paid by the mention. Honda, Honda, Honda.

"I don't like airports, so I decided to drive to L.A.: My roommate Shane drove my car, I rode shotgun and watched *Ace Ventura* on the DVD player, and Jon shouted obscenities from the back seat. We didn't go out or anything—I'm still not 21—but we did have an awesome dinner at this Thai place near our hotel in Santa Monica. I highly recommend it. It's called Poom Thai Cuisine. That's P-O-O-*M*, as in 'Mom, I promise I didn't say that other word.'"

Day 4

JANUARY 10, 1:49 P.M.

Back at Honda for another day of glad-handing, bassist Jon Walker checks in with a brand-synergy update.

"Last night the Honda people took us out to an Anaheim Ducks game—you know, 'cause they play at the Honda Center. I grew up in Chicago, so I've played some street hockey and been been to a couple of Blackhawks games, but this was crazy! All they did was skate around and smash people into walls. We mostly hung out with the suits from the company, but it was pretty cool. I had a couple of beers, Ryan had a few blue martinis—that was the drink special, strangely—and we all got free chips and guacamole.

"Before the game, the arena people gave us our own Ducks jerseys, just like the ones in the movie. Mine says WALKER on it! They even put us up on the Jumbotron for, like, five seconds, but the Ducks had just scored, so no one was paying attention. I'm sure our fans who watch Fox Sports Net loved it, though. We didn't meet the players, but we did get a picture with the big duck mascot. So I think we came out on top."

Day 5

JANUARY 11, 5:08 P.M.

As they wait for their flight to London at a bar in LAX, Ross calls with an important punctuation bulletin.

"I guess the big news today is we're dropping the exclamation point from our name. No more 'Panic! at the Disco.' We just got sick of it. We thought nobody would even notice, but people are flipping out about it. I always thought it was sort of annoying, personally—too hard to type. Other than that, we really haven't done much. I guess just dinner at Joe's Crab Shack with our friend [and label honcho] Pete [Wentz]. We never even got to see the beach.

"I forgot to pack my long johns, but otherwise I'm looking forward to England. People seem to like us there. Then again, when we played the Reading Festival someone hit Brendon in the head with a bottle. So I guess there's at least one person who doesn't.

"Oops, gotta go—we're boarding. It's a 10-hour flight, so if I fall asleep right as we're taking off, I can get a full night's sleep. Unfortunately, I left all my Ambien at home. But that's why I'm at the bar." >>

"Are you ready to rock (and pay us lots of money)?": Unplugged at Honda HQ.

Nascar courts the coveted emo demographic

"I WANT TO GET OUT AND GET INTO SOME TROUBLE. WE HAVEN'T EVEN BEEN AMBUSHED BY GROUPIES YET!" **BRENDON URIE**

Smith and pal Pete Wentz on a see-food diet at Joe's Crab Shack in L.A.

Day 6

JANUARY 13, 7:03 P.M.

One day after jet lag thwarts our appointed call, Smith phones from London's Abbey Road Studios.

"Abbey Road is amazing. We're in Studio 3, next door to where the Beatles recorded, and we're working with the guy who's mixing their back catalogue for iTunes. We haven't done the whole crossing-the-street photo yet, but soon.

"Some fans posted online that they were gonna come meet us when we got to the studio, and sure enough there was this big group of 17-year-old girls out front. We were like, 'Oh, man'—we veered off into a driveway and hid behind a hedge, trying to figure out what to do. Finally we said, 'Fuck it. It's only a few girls—we'll sign some autographs, take a picture, it'll take five minutes.' So we walk up, smiling, and they look over at us and go right on talking. Didn't even bat an eye. Turns out they were just eating lunch at the PizzaExpress next door. They had no clue who we were."

Day 7

JANUARY 14, 5:59 P.M.

Urie, in the middle of a 12-hour Abbey Road workday, calls with the final update of the week.

"It's gray here. Gray and cold and wet. January in London—who'd have thought?

"We've been wanting to get out and explore the city, see some touristy stuff like Big Ben or that giant Ferris wheel, but so far we've spent the whole time mixing—which is a technical way of saying, 'sitting around the control room listening to the same song over and over.' No partying, either—we're finishing really late, and everything here closes at, like, 5 o'clock.

"It's funny: I'm not old enough to get in anywhere in Vegas, but here in the U.K., where I can actually go to pubs, we're too busy working. I'm the only single member of the group—I want to get out and get into some trouble. We haven't even been ambushed by groupies yet! On the other hand, I haven't been hit by any bottles, either. So I guess, so far so good." [BLENDER]

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Zevon: Good singer, lame graffiti artist.

MARCH
1978
30 YEARS AGO THIS MONTH

Vital Statistics

Song "Werewolves of London"
Artist Warren Zevon
Label Asylum
Performers Warren Zevon (vocals/piano); Waddy Wachtel (guitar); Mick Fleetwood (drums); John McVie (bass)
Writers LeRoy Marinell, Wachtel and Zevon
Producer Jackson Browne
Chart debut 03/25/78
Highest chart position 21

WARREN ZEVON

"WEREWOLVES OF LONDON"

How a bunch of session pros created pop's funniest horror story

By **JOHNNY BLACK**

WARREN ZEVON BECAME accustomed to failure early. Starting out in the '60s, he failed as a Greenwich Village folkie. He failed as a Beatles-styled rocker. He failed as half of a Sonny & Cher–alike pop duo. And his 1969 debut, *Wanted Dead or Alive*, was so dire that the Chicago-born singer-songwriter's fans invariably refer to his second album as his first.

But he didn't give up. Zevon spent the first half of the '70s as the musical director for rock & roll legends the Everly Brothers. That was when Phil Everly suggested to Zevon and his writing buddy LeRoy Marinell that they should pen a dance song with the title "Werewolves of London"—Everly just liked the sound of it. Soon after, guitarist Waddy Wachtel dropped in to Marinell's Venice, California, home. "I stopped by to pick up a guitar," Wachtel tells *Blender*. "Warren goes, 'Oh, man, it's perfect that you're here. We're trying to write a song called "Werewolves of London."'"

Having spent the previous few weeks working with Linda Ronstadt, Wachtel was brimming with ideas. "I went, '*Awooo!*' Then I just spit out the whole first verse."

That verse, Wachtel reveals, "was my memories of London, right down to the restaurant, Lee Ho Fook in Soho, where I'd eaten." Wachtel then split for his session, leaving Zevon and Marinell to continue the bizarre tale of a sharp-suited werewolf slaughtering old ladies and strolling with the Queen—and to pair it with a rollicking piano riff.

"I used to sing 'Werewolves' live, years before it was recorded," recalls the SoCal singer-songwriter Jackson Browne, who'd befriended Zevon in the late '60s and, in 1976, produced *Warren Zevon*, his critically lauded sophomore release. But guess which song didn't make the cut? "There was nothing I wanted to take off in order to include 'Werewolves,'" Browne explains.

Inevitably, the track became a prime contender for 1978's *Excitable Boy*. "The album was real easy to make," Wachtel remembers, "until we got to 'Werewolves.'

"Over a period of months, we called in every fantastic L.A. session man," he continues. "The guys out of Toto, the guys that backed James Taylor, everybody."

Nothing worked until, at his wit's end, Wachtel placed a call to Mick Fleetwood, drummer of Fleetwood Mac, then just about the biggest band in the world. To his surprise, Mick and Mac bassist John McVie instantly accepted.

"When they arrived," Browne recalls, "they said, 'Look, we're not the studio assassins you're used to. Don't expect too much.'"

The session went until dawn. "Waddy and I looked at each other after about 60 takes," Browne remembers. "And we said, 'Wasn't take two pretty good?' We played it back, and it was perfect."

Having overcome his lifelong battle with the demon Drink, Zevon succumbed to cancer in 2003, but "Werewolves of London" has shown tremendous staying power since its release. It's been covered by everyone from Grateful Dead to Adam Sandler, and Minnesota governor Jesse Ventura played it at his inauguration party. The first line, "I saw a werewolf with a Chinese menu in his hand," won a BBC Radio 2 listeners' poll in 2004 for the greatest opening song line in rock history.

And, of course, Zevon's 8" x 10" portrait still hangs on the wall at Lee Ho Fook. [BLENDER]

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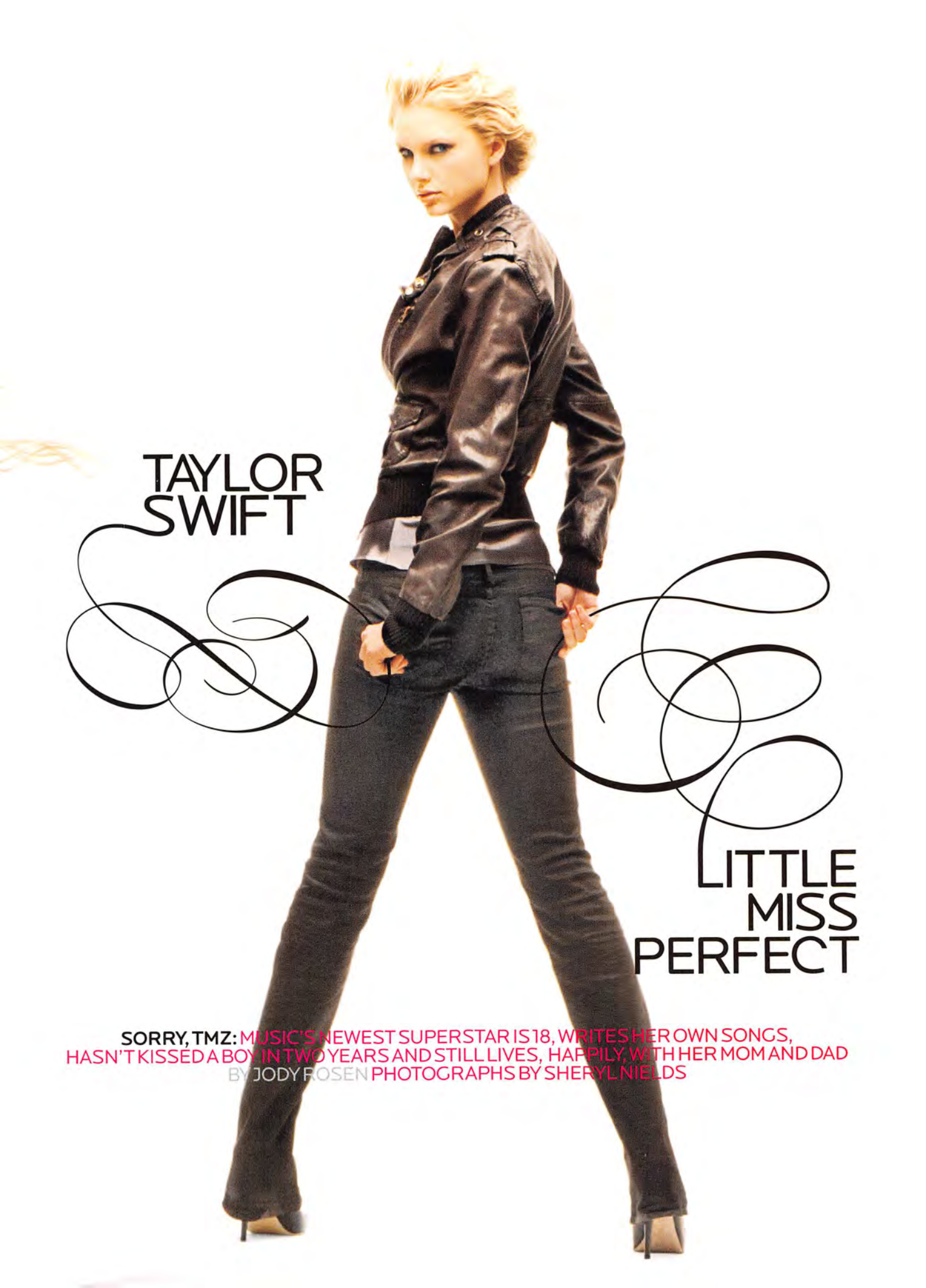

TAYLOR SWIFT

LITTLE MISS PERFECT

SORRY, TMZ: MUSIC'S NEWEST SUPERSTAR IS 18, WRITES HER OWN SONGS, HASN'T KISSED A BOY IN TWO YEARS AND STILL LIVES, HAPPILY, WITH HER MOM AND DAD

BY JODY ROSEN PHOTOGRAPHS BY SHERYL NIELDS

THAT'S SAM'S HOUSE, THE ONE WITH THE BOAT IN THE DRIVEWAY. HE'S THE GUY WHO MADE THE UNFORTUNATE ERROR OF CHEATING ON A SONGWRITER. BIG MISTAKE."

Taylor Swift, the extravagantly blond, improbably blue-eyed, intimidatingly leggy 18-year-old star is sitting in the driver's seat of her Lexus SC430, idling outside a two-story house on a serene side street in her hometown of Hendersonville, Tennessee. Hendersonville is a suburb of 40,000 that stretches along the northern shoreline of scenic Old Hickory Lake, just outside Nashville. There are a couple of gaudy strips near the turnpike, packed with malls and chain restaurants, but in general, it's a lovely, leafy place, with pretty homes set back from well-manicured lawns on pleasant little streets and culs-de-sac. A bit farther outside town, the landscape turns horse-country bucolic, and the houses get much, much bigger. Swift, who offered to show *Blender* around Hendersonville, has already piloted the Lexus past Roy Orbison's old mansion and a sprawling compound that once belonged to Johnny Cash.

Now, in the more middle-class section of town, we make the first stop on Taylor's Hendersonville Boy Tour. We're in front of Sam's, the rake who prompted Swift to write the revenge ballad "Should've Said No," one of the preternaturally catchy songs on her self-titled debut album. Not far away lives Drew, another ex, now off at college, who inspired two of Swift's monster hits, her wistful debut single, "Tim McGraw," about a thwarted summer romance between a couple who share the same favorite singer, and 2007's No. 1 country smash "Our Song." Swift pulls her car over. "I took my prom pictures in that backyard. I've totally moved on. Drew's a great guy, but we're not really in touch. His girlfriend"—Swift pauses for emphasis—"she's not much of a Taylor Swift fan."

She chuckles. "The cool thing about being a songwriter is, whatever you go through, you can write a song about it and turn it into something good for your career."

Some teenagers pour their hearts out in diaries or on their MySpace pages. Taylor Swift has a little MySpace page of her own, of course—it recently clicked past 39 million plays. But not many teens can justifiably refer to themselves in the third person, and fewer still immortalize their confessions and crushes in hit songs. She wrote or cowrote all of her debut, and each track is melodic and witty in its description of homeroom crushes or sneaking out late with a boyfriend. Swift excels at the Drew Songs (sweetly sentimental) as well as the Sam Songs (spiked with venom). She's the poet laureate of 10th-grade relationships, from first kisses to kissoffs.

Her debut, *Taylor Swift*, released by the upstart indie label Big Machine, has sold more than 2.5 million copies, thanks to an unmistakably Generation Y sound that mixes the admissions and complaints of emo—and even a little hip-hop swagger—with plucked banjos and sawing fiddles. She plays country, the last genre that actually sells records, but her songs also have pop appeal, and Universal Music, which distributes Big Machine, crossed over "Teardrops on My Guitar" and "Our Song" to Top 40 radio this winter.

Although this five-foot-eleven teenager with a cute overbite looks like she should still be on the cheerleading squad, she's not only proven her songwriting skills, she's also honed a crack live show while opening for stars twice her age, including Tim McGraw and Faith Hill, Kenny Chesney and Brad Paisley.

Her songs may have been born in high school hallways, but their dramatics also resound with adults. Brad Paisley tells *Blender*, "I was looking at a lot of artists to come out on tour with us, but as soon as I downloaded her album, I knew we had to have her. I was floored by the songwriting. I love the fact that she doesn't pretend to be 30 years old in her songs. She has a very genuine voice." In November, she won the CMA Horizon Award—Nashville's official welcome-to-the-A-list prize—and in February she attended the Grammys, where she presented an award, was a nominee for Best New Artist and chatted up Timbaland and Flo Rida.

It's safe to say there has never before been a teenage bombshell beloved by the big-hat crowd, with a penchant for acoustic Beyoncé and Rihanna covers and a habit of opening her concerts by rapping a few verses of Eminem's "Lose Yourself." While the record industry continues its slow-motion implosion—and the hitmaking princesses of a previous generation stagger from the nightclub to the rehab center—Swift is looking an awful lot like the perfect 21st-century pop star.

Back in Hendersonville, Swift steers her car into the parking lot of the high school she attended for two years before she left to pursue her career full-time. "It's so weird," she says. "All these cars belong to my friends. They're in class; I'm doing a magazine interview. Life is funny."

TAYLOR SWIFT WAS BORN ON DECEMBER 13, 1989, IN EASTERN PENNSYLVANIA, ALMOST 800 MILES NORTH OF THE GRAND OLE OPRY. She grew up in Wyomissing and in Reading, where her family owned an 11-acre Christmas-tree farm as a secondary business. (Swift's father, Scott, is a successful stockbroker.) She was always musical, but the eureka moment came when she was 6 and her mother brought home an album by LeAnn Rimes, a 13-year-old country phenom. An obsession was born. "I started listening to female country artists nonstop: Faith Hill, Shania Twain, Dixie Chicks. And they led me back to Patsy Cline and Loretta Lynn and Tammy Wynette," she says. "I think it was the storytelling that really grabbed me." The young Taylor got her first taste of live performance in a local children's musical-theater company—she played Sandy in *Grease* and Maria in *The Sound of Music*—but the influence of her heroines had already seeped into her voice. "My singing sounded a lot more country than Broadway," she recalls.

Soon, Taylor got her first guitar, practicing "until my fingers bled or my mom called me to dinner." On weekends, she dragged her parents to karaoke bars and open-mic nights. (Her play list >>

PREVIOUS SPREAD: STYLING: JEWELS, T-SHIRT: SASS AND BIDE. LEATHER-JACKET SHOT: JACKET: BROGDEN; TOP: CURVE; JEANS: J BRAND; SHOES: BRIAN ATWOOD.
THIS PAGE: STYLING: JENNY RICKER. SLIP: ONLY HEARTS; VEST: COSTUME NATIONAL; BELT AVAILABLE AT HOLLYWOOD TRADING CO.; STOCKINGS: WOLFORD;

SHE'S A TEENAGE BOMBSHELL BELOVED BY THE BIG-HAT CROWD, WITH A PENCHANT FOR COVERING BEYONCÉ AND RIHANNA SONGS AND RAPPING EMINEM LYRICS.

included "Goodbye Earl," the Dixie Chicks hit about an abused woman who gets murderous revenge.) She also began to write her own songs. And her fascination with country music made her an outcast. "She was shunned," says her mother, Andrea. "After school, I'd hear what nightmare had occurred that day, what awful thing was done to her. I'd have to pick her up off the floor." The second song Taylor wrote, when she was 12, was a schoolgirl's plaint about social ostracism, "The Outside," which made its way onto her album six years later. "I used to sit in the back of class and watch these people and their interactions and really wish that I could be included," Swift says. "Part of it was that they were already starting to party at ages 12 and 13—and I was playing at singer-songwriter nights every weekend instead."

When she was 11, Taylor persuaded her mom to vacation in Nashville, the country-music mecca: "I had a demo CD of me singing karaoke music. We rented a car, and we would pull up in front of a label on Music Row and I'd walk in and talk to the receptionist: 'Hi, I'm Taylor. I'm 11. I really want a record deal.'"

The receptionists didn't sign her, but the trip whetted Taylor's appetite. She began lobbying to relocate to Nashville.

Most parents would view this as a child's whim, an unrealistic passing fancy—country stars aren't born to Pennsylvania stockbrokers. Then her lobbying turned to begging and cajoling, and finally, in 2004, the family loaded up the truck and moved to Tennessee, like the Beverly Hillbillies in reverse. "My father had a job he could do from anywhere," Swift says. "My parents moved across the country so I could pursue a dream."

The rest is already the stuff of Nashville legend. At age 13, Taylor inked a development deal with RCA. The following year, she signed a songwriting contract with Sony/ATV Music Publishing, becoming perhaps the youngest professional tunesmith in Nashville history. In the mornings, Swift would trundle off to Hendersonville High, where she got straight A's; in the afternoons, her mother would ferry her, soccer-mom style, to Music Row for her songwriting sessions. Swift teamed up with veteran songwriter Liz Rose, and the pair began churning out material. "My sessions with Taylor were some of the easiest I've ever done," Rose says. "Basically, I was just her editor. She'd write about what happened to her in school that day. She had such a clear vision of what she was trying to say. And she'd come in with some of the most incredible hooks."

RCA wasn't so sure. A brief vogue for teen country singers—including Lila McCann, who sang adult love songs even though she wore braces—had peaked, which was probably inevitable in a genre that appeals primarily to women aged 24 to 35. Also, there hadn't been a new female country star in years: Shania Twain had hidden herself away in a European castle, eating macrobiotic, while Reba McEntire ditched music for a network-TV series. Big Machine founder Scott Borchetta—a relentless, willful executive who'd been fired from Universal despite being the best promotion man in town—pounced after seeing Swift play a few numbers at a songwriter night. "He broke two rules," says a Nashville executive. "Taylor was a teenager *and* she was female."

One afternoon in 2005, Swift brought in a new ballad to play for Rose. The song—a gentle farewell to ex-boyfriend Drew—had a wistful, indelible melody. Even better, it had a surefire gimmick, name-checking one of the biggest country stars on Earth: "When you think Tim McGraw/I hope you think my favorite song/The one we danced to all night long." There was no question what Swift's lead single would be. In July 2006, "Tim McGraw" cracked the country Top 10. By the time she finally met her song's namesake, on May 15, 2007—on live television, following a solo acoustic performance of the hit at the Academy of Country Music Awards—she could greet him as a fellow platinum-selling superstar.

Today, Swift lives with her mom, dad and 16-year-old brother, Austin, in the same rambling McMansion they moved into when they arrived from Pennsylvania. One of her parents always travels with her on tour. Taylor legally became an adult last December, but she is in no hurry to leave the nest. "My parents are the coolest," she exults. "My mother is *so* not a momager."

A visitor to the Swifts' home would meet a group just like any other affluent suburban family, only far happier and more well-adjusted. There's a music room, stocked with guitars, recording equipment and framed gold records and awards. But the house has not been turned into the Taylor Swift Hall of Fame and Museum, which may go a long way in explaining Swift's diva-free affect. The only fancy toy she's bought with her small fortune is the Lexus.

She recently went to a Nashville Predators hockey game with *American Idol* alums Carrie Underwood and Kellie Pickler. "It was really neat," Pickler hoots. "Total blonde power. After the game, we pulled into a gas station and Carrie saw this guy talking to Taylor. We were like, *This isn't right!* I said, 'Get away from her, you old man. If you're still around when we finish filling up with gas, we'll make a hood ornament out of you!'"

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: **At age 3; with a friend at Hendersonville High; clutching her CMA Horizon Award in 2007; mugging with Faith Hill and Tim McGraw in Las Vegas.**

Nights like that are rare: Swift prefers to spend what little free time she has with family or hanging out with her best friend, Abigail, a senior at Hendersonville High. Taylor is polite and articulate and funny and self-deprecating—the only time she bristles is when she is reminded that she has occasionally been called "the country Britney Spears." And who can blame her?

In fact, the only cause for concern is that Swift may be slightly *too* good, *too* cautious—career-focused with such an unswerving sense of propriety that she is not acting her age. She confesses that she hasn't kissed a boy since her album came out nearly two years ago ("I just don't have the time") and that she skips parties with her high school friends to avoid any underage scandal that may arise: "There could be drinking there or whatever. Your career could go up in smoke just like that. It's not worth the risk." What 18-year-old creates a world that consists entirely of work—and excludes the delights of dating, gossip and keg stands? When will repressed temptations cause her to break out in boils and hives and run naked across the tidy lawns of Hendersonville, calling the names of Sam and Drew?

Not this month, certainly. She has partnered with Tennessee Governor Phil Bredesen in a cause that could offend no one: combating Internet sex predators. ("It's such an important issue," Swift intones.) She says she plans to vote in November's presidential election, but when asked if she's a Democrat or a Republican, you can

CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: COURTESY OF TAYLOR SWIFT (2); KEVIN WINTER/ACMA/GETTY IMAGES/NEWSCOM; JOHN ANGELILLO/UPI/NEWSCOM.

MATCHMAKER, MATCHMAKER

It's almost time for Taylor Swift's senior prom—but she's too busy to find a date! Here, we evaluate four potential escorts BY JOSH EELLS

DAVID RAGAN, 22
2007 NASCAR ROOKIE OF THE YEAR
PRO: Getting picked up in a 750-horsepower Ford stock car is way cooler than getting picked up in a limo.
CON: Logo-laden, flame-retardant jumpsuit might clash with her dress.

COLE AND DYLAN SPROUSE, 15
STARS, DISNEY CHANNEL'S *THE SUITE LIFE WITH ZACK & CODY*
PRO: Early curfew means they won't try any funny business at the lake house afterward.
CON: Potential social suicide by showing up to prom with a couple of sophomores.

SOULJA BOY, 17
CHART-TOPPING RAPPER
PRO: Could introduce hot new dance moves like the Crank That (Decoration Committee) and the Crank That (Cummerbund).
CON: Refuses to slow dance.

TROY WATSON, 18
QUARTERBACK AND MVP, HENDERSONVILLE HIGH COMMANDOS
PRO: A football captain at Swift's high school who passed for 10 touchdowns and was named to the 2007 All-Region team.
CON: On MySpace page, says he likes "any type of music except country." Oops!

And the winner is...

"**PEREZ HILTON!**" Swift says. "Your prom date is supposed to be fun and hilarious, and I think I'd have more fun with Perez than anyone else."

see the wheels turning, as she searches for the ideal inoffensive non-answer: "I don't think I'm either."

Swift takes *Blender* out to lunch at a local Applebee's—"You may as well get the full Hendersonville experience," she quips—and is instantly thrust into press-the-flesh mode, patiently signing autographs for all the fans who flock to her table. This includes a ditzy waitress who at first fails to recognize her, then asks if anyone has ever told Taylor she looks like Faith Hill and finally suggests she consider a modeling career. Later today, Swift is scheduled to fly to Phoenix to sing at a corporate event for Procter & Gamble. "It's going to be fun," she chirps. "I love so many of their brands."

Britney Spears and Paris Hilton might roll their eyes at this naiveté, then hijack an SUV to the next Beverly Hills debauchery. But there is a large part of the U.S. that still prefers good behavior over bad. And in a country where blond female singers are the new gangsta rappers, Taylor appeals to moms who worry about their daughters having proper role models, and who'll happily buy a pair of $28 tickets to spend a wholesome family night out and support an ideal.

After lunch, Swift takes *Blender* for another drive and cues up a bunch of new demos, each catchier than the next: a tense rocker, cowritten with Kellie Pickler; a sweet folk-tinged song dedicated to BFF Abigail; an unreasonably hooky '80s-style power ballad. (Swift declares herself "the biggest Def Leppard fan in the world.") In late March, she'll hit the road with country mega-hitmakers Rascal Flatts, popping into the studio in free moments to start her next album. "Taylor will be around a long time," Brad Paisley predicts. "Her audience will grow with her."

In the meantime, Swift can indulge her one apparent vice: schadenfreude. The liner notes to the deluxe edition of *Taylor Swift* include an epic list of thank-yous, followed by a taunting postscript: "To all the boys who thought they would be cool and break my heart, guess what? Here are 14 songs written about you. HA." You can't help but feel for the guy who inspired Swift's latest single, "Picture to Burn," where she nyah-nyahs, "So go and tell your friends that I'm obsessive and crazy/That's fine, I'll tell mine you're gay." Taylor's *Mean Girls* moments are reminders that, despite her grown-up career and sylphine presence on the red carpet, she's a teenager, just a few years removed from the daily humiliations at Wyomissing Area Junior High.

Steering her Lexus down the winding road back to her house, she recounts a close encounter with another ex-boyfriend, the guy who inspired the hit heartbreak ballad "Teardrops on My Guitar." "I was on my way out of the house to meet Carrie and Kellie for the hockey game," she says. "He was standing there in my driveway. I haven't talked to this guy in two years. I was like, 'Um, hi?'" She chuckles gently. "It would have been really cool and poetic if he had turned up at my house right after my album came out. But it was two years later. A couple of things had happened in my life since then. I was like, 'It's really great to see you. But you're a little late.'" [BLENDER]

RAGAN: WALTER G. ARCE/ASP/SPORT MEDIA/NEWSCOM; COLE AND DYLAN SPROUSE: MARK SAVAGE/CORBIS; SOULJA BOY: SOUL BROTHER/FILMMAGIC; WATSON: COURTESY OF THE WATSON FAMILY; SWIFT: BRYAN BEDDER/GETTY IMAGES; HILTON: CHRIS POLK/GETTY IMAGES; SUNSET: JUAN SILVA/JUPITER IMAGES.

20 BIGGEST RECORD-COMPANY SCREW-UPS OF ALL TIME

FROM TURNING DOWN THE BEATLES TO STOMPING NAPSTER— THE MOST ILL-ADVISED, FOOLHARDY AND DOWNRIGHT IDIOTIC DECISIONS EVER MADE BY **THE MAN**

BY JON DOLAN, JOSH EELLS, FRED GOODMAN, DAVID PEISNER, JONAH WEINER AND DOUGLAS WOLK

ILLUSTRATION BY SHEPARD FAIREY

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RECORDS

#20 THEY NEVER EVEN RECOUPED THEIR AQUA NET EXPENSES

As grunge dawns, one label bets on hair metal

In 1989, with hair metal reaching its zenith, the A&R department at MCA Records finally decided to get in on the act—by tossing a rumored $1 million at L.A. band Pretty Boy Floyd, who at the time had played only eight shows. The band's debut, *Leather Boyz With Electric Toyz*, peaked at No. 130 on the *Billboard charts*, and the Floyd went through another mil or so of MCA's money before the label finally dropped them in 1991 ... right around the time the suits blew a chance to sign a fledgling Seattle outfit called Nirvana.

Unintended consequence Around 1992, the Sunset Strip pizza-delivery scene gets a fresh infusion of talent.

Pretty Boy Floyd: "We will never, ever regret this photograph."

19// THE VINYL SOLUTION

The industry kills the single—and begins its own slow demise

→ In the early '80s, the music industry began to phase out vinyl singles in favor of cassettes and later, CDs. Then, since it costs the same to manufacture a CD single as a full album, they ditched the format almost altogether. But they forgot that singles were how fans got into the music-buying habit before they had enough money to spend on albums. The end result? Kids who expect music for free. "Greed to force consumers to buy an album [resulted] in the loss of an entire generation of record consumers," says *Billboard* charts expert Joel Whitburn. "People who could only afford to buy their favorite hit of the week were told it wasn't available as a single. Instead, they stopped going to record shops and turned their attention to illegally downloading songs."

Unintended consequence The Eagles still top the album charts.

18// COME BACK, KID

BMG dumps Clive Davis, begs him to return

→ In 2000, when company retirement policy deemed Clive Davis too old to run Arista, the label he'd founded 25 years earlier, he was pushed out the door in favor of Antonio "L.A." Reid. After loud public complaints from artists including Whitney Houston and Carlos Santana, parent company BMG was shamed into giving Davis a nice going-away present—his own label, J Records, along with a $150 million bankroll. Ironically, while J spawned hits from Alicia Keys, Luther Vandross and Rod Stewart, Arista reportedly chalked up hundreds of millions in losses. In 2002, BMG forked over another $50 million to buy J, then two years later ousted Reid and hired a new CEO of BMG North America: an ambitious young turk named Clive Davis

Unintended consequence Rod Stewart's *The Great American Songbook, Volumes I-IV*

17// DIM BULB

Thomas Edison disses jazz, industry standards

→ America's most famous inventor, and the creator of the phonograph, also had his own record label: National Phonograph Company, later Edison Records. Naturally, it was the biggest one around at first but made two fatal errors. One was that Edison records worked only on Edison's players, while other manufacturers' conformed to the industry standard and worked interchangeably. The other was that Edison let his personal taste govern Edison releases—and he hated jazz: "I always play jazz records backwards," he sniffed. "They sound better that way." So after releasing the world's first jazz recording—Collins and Harlan's "That Funny Jas Band From Dixieland"—the company spurned the craze in favor of waltzes and foxtrots. Edison Records folded in October 1929.

Unintended consequence Edison adds "tin-eared A&R" to his list of inventions.

16// DOUBLE JEOPARDY

Warner pays for Wilco record twice

→ When Wilco handed over *Yankee Hotel Foxtrot* to Reprise in June 2001, acting label boss David Kahne—best known for producing Sugar Ray albums—reportedly thought it was "so bad it would kill Wilco's career." The band refused to make changes, so Reprise handed them their walking papers—and the masters to the album. A few months later, Wilco signed with Nonesuch, which, like Reprise, was a subsidiary of AOL Time Warner, meaning that after shelling out roughly $300,000 to make *YHF* in the first place, the corporation was now paying for it again. The record remains Wilco's best seller to date.

Unintended consequence Jeff Tweedy's poetry collection is published in 2004.

15// MONEY FOR NOTHING

MCA's teen-pop calamity

→ How sure was MCA that slinky Irish teen Carly Hennessy was going to be a gargantuan pop star? So sure that in 1999 they staked the former Denny's sausage spokesmodel with a $100,000 advance, $5,000 a month in living expenses and an apartment in Marina Del Rey, California, spending roughly $2.2 million in all on her 2001 debut, *Ultimate High*. How wrong were they? In its first three months in stores, *Ultimate High* sold a whopping 378 copies, putting the label's investment somewhere in the order of $5,820 per copy sold. Last seen, Hennessy had resurfaced—still looking for her big break—on season seven of *American Idol*.

Unintended consequence "Sausage spokesmodel" proves a less embarrassing resumé entry than expected.

14// ALWAYS READ THE FINE ... OH, NEVER MIND

Stax Records unintentionally gives away the store

→ Soul fans can credit Memphis's Stax Records for classic hits by Otis Redding, Sam & Dave and Booker T & the M.G.'s—but the real winner was Atlantic. In 1960, Atlantic partner Jerry Wexler liked one of Stax's first releases enough to pay label president Jim Stewart $1,000 to lease it, and Atlantic soon contracted to market and distribute all Stax releases. Seven years later, with Stax

PREVIOUS SPREAD: ILLUSTRATION: STUDIONUMBER-ONE.COM; STAR: JAMESON SIMPSON. THIS PAGE: PRETTY BOY FLOYD: WILLIAM HANES; HENNESSY: 1993: COURTESY OF KERRY FOODS AND DDFH&B ADVERTISING; 2001: GARRETT BRENNAN/CAMERA PRESS/RETNA

reeling from Redding's death, Stewart finally took a close look at the Atlantic contract and discovered he'd been bamboozled: Contrary to industry practice, Atlantic became the owner of any Stax release it handled. Stax had signed away its catalogue and future.
Unintended consequence Bob Dole flips "Soul Man" into "Dole Man" during his '96 presidential campaign.

13// THE LAST OF THE MEGA-DEALS
One label's big spending single-handedly ends "alt-rock" boom

→ In 1996, Warner Bros. signed R.E.M. to a five-album contract for a reported $80 million. It was the most costly record deal in history and elicited one of the lowest returns. Warner needed R.E.M. to sell at least 3 million copies of all five records to come out in the black, but sleepy folk-rock albums like 1998's *Up* moved a fifth of that. The execs went further into the hole by allowing R.E.M. to keep the masters of all their Warner releases, forfeiting future revenues generated by the band's popular '80s and early-'90s discs. No one knows how much the label lost—but the debacle brought to a close an era in which acts known for their "integrity" could score huge paydays.
Unintended consequence Warner executives still hoping "Daysleeper" makes it on to *The Hills* soundtrack.

12// AXL GREASE
Geffen pumps millions into (the nonexistent) *Chinese Democracy*

→ Ten years ago, Guns N' Roses still looked like a good investment—they'd gone platinum 32 times. So in 1998, Geffen Records could be forgiven for paying Axl Rose a million bucks to complete GNR's fifth album, promising a million more if he delivered it soon. (Rose had already spent four years working on the LP, losing every original bandmate in the process.) Beset by perfectionism, lack of focus and plain-old nuttiness, Rose never got that bonus million. But his label kept spending: In 2001, monthly expenses totaled $244,000. Four producers and a gazillion guitar overdubs later, the album is no closer to release. And Geffen's in the red for $13 million.
Unintended consequence A frustrated Rose gets into a well-publicized fistfight with ... Tommy Hilfiger!

11// JUST BE YOURSELF—OR ELSE
Geffen sues Neil Young for making "unrepresentative" music

→ At the dawn of the '80s, David Geffen signed Neil Young to his new record label, promising that "commercial" considerations would never get in the way of art. Young took this to heart, wandering so far off the reservation with albums like 1983's synth-driven *Trans* that Geffen filed a $3 million breach-of-contract suit: effectively charging the folk-rock icon with not making "Neil Young" records. Young filed a $21 million countersuit before settling out of court, but remained somewhat bemused by Geffen's judgment: "He didn't seem to comprehend how ... uh, diverse my musical career had become," Young said.
Unintended consequence Young's *Happy House* and *Tejano* albums remain on the shelf.

10// YOUTH MOVEMENT
Columbia Records loses Alicia Keys, drops 50 Cent

→ Columbia had a way with young talent in the late '90s and early '00s. First, after plunking down a reported $400,000 to sign Alicia Keys, they turned her over to high-priced producers who tried to transform her into Whitney Houston. Frustrated, she bolted—and signed with J Records, where she has sold more than 20 million albums to date. Around the same time, another languishing Columbia prospect, 50 Cent, recorded "How to Rob" in a desperate attempt to get his label to notice him. But when he was shot nine times in 2000, skittish execs dumped him—and then watched as he became an unstoppable one-man money factory at Interscope.
Unintended consequence Fedoras and bulletproof vests become essential urban-fashion accessories.

9// SPY GAME
"Digital-rights management" backfires even more badly than usual

→ In a 2005 effort to combat digital piracy, Sony BMG packaged millions of CDs with copy-protection software that automatically installed a "rootkit" on users' PCs, which, in addition to preventing consumers from making more than three copies of their legally purchased CD, also made them vulnerable to viruses and hackers. Sony BMG initially downplayed the problem, but after the Department of Homeland Security issued an advisory, the label recalled more than 4 million CDs. Sony was accused of spying on its customers' listening habits and was forced to pay several million dollars to settle class-action lawsuits that alleged violations of spyware laws and deceptive trade practices.
Unintended consequence Radiohead offer up *In Rainbows* for a bargain pay-what-you-like price.

8// RAP ATTACK
Warner junks Interscope

→ When anti-rap crusaders wanted to deliver a body blow to hip-hop, they took aim at the Warner Music Group, because its corporate parent, Time Warner, was American-owned and publicly traded. When Ice-T's "Cop Killer" became too hot to handle, Warner Music dropped him, but the label still enjoyed huge rap hits—particularly through Death Row Records, partially owned by their Interscope label. But when Republican presidential candidate Bob Dole attacked Warner Music in his stump speech, Time Warner panicked, ordering the sale of Interscope to rival Universal. Universal soon became the biggest record company in the world—in large measure due to Interscope hits by Tupac, Dr. Dre and Eminem. Warner Music went on a long slide and was finally sold in 2004.
Unintended consequence Time Warner shareholders never have to worry about who killed Tupac.

7// SOMETHING'S HAPPENING, BUT YOU DON'T KNOW WHAT IT IS
Music publisher gives away Bob Dylan

→ In the early 1960s Leeds/Duchess was a legendary music-publishing company but far from the hippest: It knew Tin Pan Alley but couldn't find a Greenwich Village coffeehouse with a compass. Yet when Columbia signed Bob Dylan in 1961, they steered him to Leeds, where he happily signed a publishing deal with a $1,000 advance. The following year, Dylan's new manager, Albert Grossman, got out of the deal with the disinterested publisher simply by repaying the $1,000. Dylan's new publisher, the savvier M. Witmark & Sons, received 237 songs—many of them future standards worth tens of millions of dollars—in just the first three years.
Unintended consequence The receptionists at Leeds/Duchess never have to field calls asking what "All Along the Watchtower" is really about.

R.E.M.: PATRICK MCMULLAN/GETTY IMAGES; YOUNG: HENRY DILTZ/CORBIS; YOUNG: DAVID REDFERN/RETNA; DYLAN: FRANK DRIGGS COLLECTION/GETTY IMAGES; ROSE: ASHLEY MAILE/RETNA.

6// NOTHING EXCEEDS LIKE EXCESS

Casablanca rides strong sales straight to the poorhouse

→ No record label represents the coked-up inanity of the late '70s like disco-driven behemoth Casablanca. In 1978, the label simultaneously shipped a million copies of four solo albums by each member of their biggest rock act, Kiss, so they could justifiably claim the records "shipped platinum." The albums sold well—but not that well. Record stores returned hundreds of thousands of unsold copies, inspiring comedian Robert Klein to joke that Casablanca's releases "shipped gold and returned platinum." The label continued to lose millions a year throughout the late '70s, until part-owner PolyGram Records bought out founder Neil Bogart for $15 million in 1980.
Unintended consequence Hey, man—400,000 extra surfaces to snort drugs from!

5// WHOA, MAMA

The RIAA sues a struggling single mom for digital piracy

→ In the court of public opinion, it's hard to find a more sympathetic defendant than a single mother of two, earning $36,000 a year. So what in the name of common decency was the Recording Industry Association of America thinking when it went after 30-year-old Jammie Thomas from Brainerd, Minnesota? The RIAA accused Thomas of using the P2P service Kazaa to illegally share MP3 files of 24 songs, including Journey's "Don't Stop Believin'," the Goo Goo Dolls' "Iris" and Destiny's Child's "Bills, Bills, Bills." Thomas pleaded not guilty, blaming the shared files on mistaken identity, but last October a jury disagreed and fined her $222,000. That breaks down to a whopping $9,250 per song—more than six times her annual salary. At press time, Thomas was planning an appeal.
Unintended consequence The nation's toddlers and fluffy kittens rush to erase their hard drives.

4// PAY (SOMEBODY ELSE) TO PLAY

Indie promoters take the major labels to the cleaners

→ After the payola scandals of the '50s, the government barred record labels from paying radio stations to play records. The solution: set up middlemen to do the dirty work! "Independent promoters" represented the labels' interests to radio programmers, creating a massive cash flow of corruption. Even a midsize hit could cost $700,000 in promo expenses—cash, vacations, drugs and other illicit rewards for mustachioed DJs—and labels ended up paying to get airplay for huge artists the stations would have spun anyway. A lot of coked-up DJs got nice tans, while the labels spent unnecessary millions and covered their balance sheets in bloody red.
Unintended consequence Colombian GDP spikes each time Mariah Carey releases a single.

3// DETROIT AT A DISCOUNT

Motown sells for a pittance

→ In 1988 Berry Gordy Jr., reportedly losing millions of dollars on the label he had founded decades earlier, sold Motown and its incomparable back catalogue to MCA and investment company Boston Ventures for $60 million. How bad was that price? The next year, Herb Alpert and Jerry Moss sold their A&M Records to PolyGram for roughly $500 million. In 1990, David Geffen got about $700 million for Geffen Records and in '92, Richard Branson unloaded Virgin Records to EMI for $960 million. And five years after buying Motown, Boston Ventures cashed out, selling the label to PolyGram for $325 million—a return of more than 500 percent.
Unintended consequence The Motown Atlantic airline, and Berry's career as a trans-global balloonist, have yet to materialize.

2// TOMORROW NEVER KNOWS

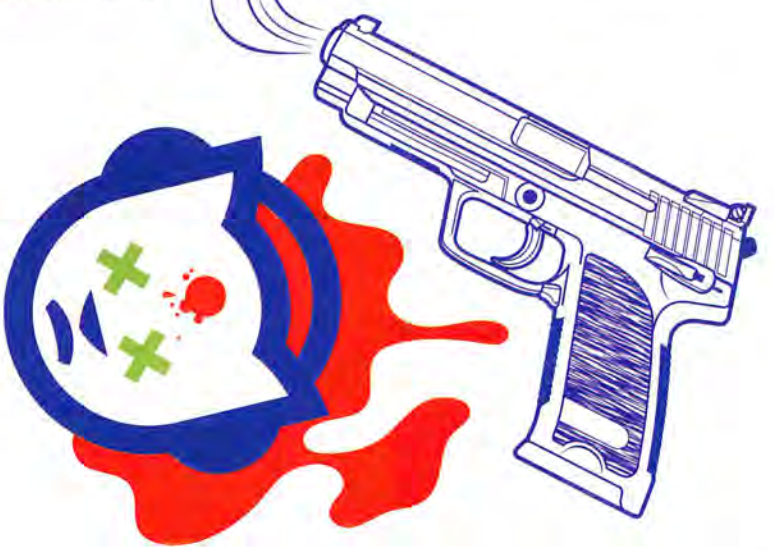
Decca Records A&R exec tells Fab Four, "No, thanks"

→ Dick Rowe was not the only record-label executive who passed on the Beatles in the early '60s, but he was the only one who brushed off their manager, Brian Epstein, with the astute prediction that "groups with guitars are on their way out." Epstein begged Rowe to reconsider, so Rowe hopped a train to Liverpool to check out the band live. When he arrived at the Cavern, he found a mob of kids trying to force their way into the club in the pouring rain. Annoyed, he smoked a cigarette, went home and signed Brian Poole and the Tremeloes instead.
Unintended consequence The Monkees

#1 THE BIGGEST RECORD-COMPANY SCREWUP OF ALL TIME

Major labels squash Napster

Shawn Fanning's file-sharing service attracted tens of millions of users, but instead of trying to find a way to capitalize on it, the Recording Industry Association of America rejected Napster's billion-dollar settlement offer and sued it out of existence in 2001. Napster's users didn't just disappear. They scattered to hundreds of alternative systems—and new technology has stayed three steps ahead of the music business ever since. The labels' campaign to stop their music from being acquired for free across the Internet has been like trying to cork a hurricane—upward of a billion files are swapped every month on peer-to-peer networks. "There's been no decline in the rate of online piracy" since Napster closed, says Eric Garland of media analysts BigChampagne—whose research shows that the number of users of son-of-Napster peer-to-peer networks more than doubled between 2002 and 2007. And that figure doubles again if you count BitTorrent.
Unintended consequence **Your grandmother deciding to trade up from that dial-up connection**



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ROCK STARS

INVITE HIM ONSTAGE, BUT HE CAN'T SING.
HE'S BEEN TO MORE THAN 5,000 LIVE SHOWS
IN 11 YEARS, BUT HE MAY HAVE NOWHERE TO LIVE.

MEET

BEATLE BOB

THE WORLD'S MOST OBSESSIVE

FAN

BY
DAVID
PEISNER

PHOTOGRAPHS BY
BRENT
HUMPHREYS

Beatle Bob: "The future's so bright, I gotta wear ... mustard blazers."

On a cold, clear Friday night in November, a 55-year-old man in a blue pinstripe blazer, a red paisley shirt and black pants ducks into the cramped lobby of a nightclub called Off Broadway.

"This is one of my favorite spots in St. Louis," he says, greeting the doorman and bounding into the club's brick-walled main room. He strides across the dance floor until he's standing on the far left side of the stage, at the feet of the evening's performer, ex-major-label folk-rocker Garrison Starr.

"Hey, everyone!" Starr announces to the crowd, midsong. "It's Beatle Bob!" Bob offers a quick wave to the audience, points a long finger toward Starr and begins dancing. He's a tall, angular figure, and with his mop-topped head hunched forward, his arms bent sharply at the elbows and his hands bobbing and swimming awkwardly in front of his waist, he looks like a man rifling through a filing cabinet while waiting desperately to use the toilet. There is nothing smooth, rhythmic or graceful about his dancing. It seems to exist in its own world, completely divorced from the music inspiring it.

When the song ends, Starr looks down at Bob and smiles: "How you been?"

"Just staying in the groove," Bob replies.

A version of this scene has repeated itself every night for more than a decade. Throughout the past 11 years, live music has been a singular obsession for Robert Matonis—or Beatle Bob. He claims to have been out to at least one show every single night since Christmas Day 1996, and nothing during that time—work, family, illness or sheer exhaustion—has broken his streak. For the last few years, Beatle Bob has been popping up, Zelig-like, at dozens of far-flung music festivals, often hopping onstage to introduce bands or just do his dance. For the bands themselves, simply having Beatle Bob appear at a show serves as a touring rite of passage: When Bob turns up to see you play, it's a sign you've truly arrived.

"He's known all over the place for having this passion for dancing at different shows," says Tim DeLaughter of the Polyphonic Spree, who were joined onstage by Bob at Lollapalooza last year.

Indeed, once you know where to look, Beatle Bob is everywhere: In 2003, he was featured in a video for the Guided by Voices song "My Kind of Soldier"; in August 2006, he was dancing onstage as the New Pornographers performed "Bones of an Idol" at Lollapalooza; in June 2007, he introduced Franz Ferdinand at Bonnaroo; he'll soon be the subject of a documentary scheduled for release this year.

But beyond his cartoonish profile—the novelty haircut, arrhythmic dancing and punishing nightlife schedule—rock's most obsessive concertgoer is an enigma. Bob apparently doesn't drive, yet manages to travel to venues around St. Louis every night and to festivals around the country; he claims to have a regular job, but nobody seems quite sure what it is; there are even those in St. Louis who suspect he may be homeless.

"I've known Bob for over 25 years, and he's still a mystery," says Joe Schwab, owner of the St. Louis independent store Euclid Records. "All I know is that he's at every show I go to."

BEATLE BOB SAYS that the first performer ever to invite him onstage was Chuck Berry, who spotted him dancing during an outdoor festival on the Fourth of July in 1977. By that time, Bob had already been dancing religiously at shows for two years, after watching a normally reserved friend cut a vicious rug at a concert by '70s power-pop singer Dwight Twilley.

Raised in South St. Louis, Robert Matonis was christened "Beatle Bob" at Catholic boarding school—by a nun who caught him reading a magazine about the Fab Four concealed in a geography textbook. Living with his stepfather, who Bob claims was abusive, he found solace in dancing to old 45s by Gene Vincent and the Everly Brothers. He's been fixated on music ever since—and dancing continues to provide him with indispensable physical release.

"It's just an exhilarating feeling, a euphoria that's hard to put into words," he says as we drive the dilapidated streets of his old neighborhood. "It helps after a stressful day at work. You plug in to the music and it gives you an uplifting feeling."

Since his current streak began in 1996, Bob estimates he's seen well over 5,000 shows. His tastes lean toward guitar-pop, garage rock, rockabilly and anything related to the '60s, but some nights, he admits, he can't be that picky.

"Sunday nights, usually there's no national acts; it's the same local bands all the time. What makes it good for me is the overall experience. When I go to a club, I know the chef, the waitresses, the door guy, the sound guy, the security. I'll talk to them before and after the show, and during breaks. I'll talk to the bands and the fans, too. I'm usually the last person to leave."

But surely there must be times he just doesn't feel up to it?

"There have been nights I was a little tired, but here's my motto: Drag yourself there, the bands will pick you up."

Bob credits his decade-plus run of nightly gigs to his health regimen: He's

been a vegetarian since 1982, doesn't drink, smoke or take drugs and says he requires just four or five hours of sleep a night. He's endured injuries—at last year's JazzFest in New Orleans, he sliced open his ankle dancing, then got it patched up at the first-aid tent and returned to action—and he reasons that only a serious medical problem could break his streak.

"It would have to be something really, really bad that put me in the hospital," Bob says. "I mean, there will be a point where I'll have to slow down. The way I envision it is I'll dance a couple songs and sit down for a while longer. I can envision myself sitting down for some songs."

So Bob remains determined to maintain his run—it has meant missing friends' weddings, their kids' graduations and many of the everyday social interactions most of us take for granted. Bob has never been married; he refers to nearly everyone he knows as a "good friend," though it's unclear how

OPENING SPREAD (POSTER): DAVIES + STARR.

Beatle Bob enraptures the crowd with a reenactment of his last typing test.

many of these people would describe Bob with the same superlative.

"On the face of it, the guy is more than eccentric," says Jeffrey Arnett, a psychologist and the author of *Metalheads: Heavy Metal & Adolescent Alienation*. "You are within a normal psychiatric range when your activities do not interfere with your love and work. But Bob needs structure in his life. His whole life is built around the dancing. It seems to be all he has."

But however it may look, Bob insists he lives a balanced life: "I squeeze other things in besides music, enough where it doesn't completely consume me. Plus, I'm fulfilled. I'm doing a good thing there."

ON THE THIRD Thursday of each month, Bob hosts his own "Beatle Bob Presents" live show in St. Louis, and one night in November, *Blender* accompanies him to the venue, the Lucas School House. Despite the large ad for the show he proudly points out in the local alternative weekly, by 9 P.M. the place is still almost empty. "There's a lot of competition tonight," Bob says. "Los Lobos are playing at the hockey arena. I bet that's hurting us."

After introducing the opening band, the noisy indie-rock outfit Laite, he takes up a position stage right, where he dances with equal enthusiasm to stormy, feedback-heavy rockers and solo guitar ballads alike.

After the set, Bob apologizes to the headliners—an electro-pop duo called Mad Happy—for the meager turnout. Even so, the club's owner, Dan Jameson, is satisfied with the "Beatle Bob Presents" series.

"He's come up with some great shows," Jameson says. "He's this iconic figure. Even people outside St. Louis know that if Beatle Bob's here, it must be a great show." Jameson only met Bob, whom he pays a small fee for his work, last year—but as he's gotten to know him, he's been impressed.

"I've asked him a lot of questions, because he's this mystery figure, and I want to know who I'm dealing with," Jameson says. "Not a lot of people know that he's a social worker. But I've found him to be down-to-earth and genuine."

And at first, there seems to be little that's really strange about Bob's life during daylight hours. He does indeed say he's a social worker at the Agape Academy & Child Development Center in St. Louis: "I work with kids, teenagers, sometimes with drug problems. Sometimes they need special training for comprehending school real good. There are so many people out there who feel like there's no one helping them."

As for home, he says he's currently staying with a friend, because the basement of his house recently flooded: "The sewers backed up, and all the basements down the whole block flooded. It actually made the local news."

Later that night, *Blender* drops Bob off at his mom's house, about 40 minutes

from downtown St. Louis. The following day, we spend a few hours driving between various landmarks in Bob's life: his grandparents' old house; the St. Vincent Home for Children, where he says he worked during the '70s; Club 54, where in the mid-'80s James Brown invited him onstage to dance. As the sun begins to set, Bob agrees to take *Blender* by his home. Out in a lower-middle-class suburb, we eventually stop in front of a slightly ramshackle house with an aging wooden porch and walk out onto the patchy front lawn.

"I'd take you in, but the smell is really bad," he says and points to six garbage cans on the side. Bob is still explaining the house's features when a stout, middle-age woman emerges from the front door. "Can I help you?" she asks.

Bob walks toward her. "How you doing? Is Dan around? I was looking for my uncle Dan, who lives next door."

The woman looks confused. She points across the street: "Dan's house is over there."

Bob thanks her and motions us back to the car. We ask him what's going on.

"She knows Dan, my uncle who lives here," he says, pointing at the house next to the one where we were apparently trespassing. "That gal, Alisa, she works with the crew my uncle Dan hired to clean up in there."

A few hours later, we return without Bob and discover that the woman who'd answered the door has lived there for 37 years, is not named Alisa and has never seen Bob before in her life. Later, a phone call to the Agape Academy reveals that Bob doesn't work there and never has.

THE THING YOU have to understand about Beatle Bob," says Jenni Sterling, who has spent much of the last three years working on a documentary about him, "is that there is a kernel of truth to everything he says. The house flooding is true, but it happened 10 years ago—and it was at his grandmother's."

"I take Beatle Bob with a grain of salt," says Lisa Andris, the former owner of the St. Louis club Hi-Pointe, who says she knows Bob better than anyone. "He's a very sweet, pure, thoughtful person, but there's no point in trying to drag Bob into reality. Bob has his own reality."

Bob is widely rumored to be a kleptomaniac with a penchant for shoplifting CDs, though he's never been charged with a crime. Andris says Bob would frequently take CDs out of her office, but his stealing, she maintains, is a largely irrational compulsion, and not for profit. Asked about Bob's job as a social worker, she laughs.

"He answered the phones at Acid Rescue, like, 20 or 25 years ago," she says. "He doesn't work. It's a full-time job being Beatle Bob. The amount of energy he puts into his life is probably equivalent to any *Fortune* 500-company vice president. There's no way to factor a job into that."

So if Bob doesn't work, how does he survive? Apparently, for a time he was able to travel the country on airline buddy passes supplied by a friend. Now he takes public transportation to shows around St. Louis or bums rides from friends, particularly when heading out of town.

"He occasionally emcees festivals and gets paid small amounts," Sterling says. "I think that covers his cell phone and his storage space. But I worry about Bob constantly, especially since I've been done filming. How is he going to feed himself if I'm not there to take him to dinner? Where is he sleeping if I'm not there to take him to his mother's?"

The one point about Beatle Bob's life that everyone agrees is true is the one that seems the least likely—the fact that he's been out to see music every night for more than a decade. What's more, according to Andris, Bob remembers nearly every show. "Bob will say, 'Remember when you had Sylvain Sylvain at Hi-Pointe, Wednesday night, June 3, 1992?' I couldn't tell you what year I did any show. He'll know what the weather was."

Such behavior is one of the things that has led some of Bob's friends to suspect he may have Asperger's syndrome, a high-functioning type of autism. *The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* lists the symptoms of Asperger's as including "preoccupation with one or more stereotyped and restricted patterns of interest that is abnormal either in intensity or focus ... apparently inflexible adherence to specific, nonfunctional routines or rituals ... repetitive motor mannerisms (e.g., hand or finger flapping or twisting, or complex whole-body movements)."

"I think a lot of his lies are just compensation, because he's always known deep down that he's not normal," Sterling says. "He comes up with these elaborate stories, so he comes across as being just like everyone else. It's the way he socializes. Music is how he connects to the world. When he's dancing, that's the closest to normal he ever feels. That's why he's so obsessed."

Bob denies all of this—the lying, the stealing, the joblessness, the homelessness and the Asperger's. Confronted with the truth, he compounds his original lies with new ones; when we ask him about the possibility that he has Asperger's, he says it's a subject that's been broached with him before: "I don't see any symptoms that would make me believe I had it."

Perhaps it doesn't matter anyway—even if Asperger's explained Bob's bizarre behavior, what matters more than where he lives or how he makes a living is his all-consuming enthusiasm for music.

"Isn't it kind of refreshing," asks Andris, "to see someone who never wavers from their mission? I find it inspiring: He's a purist. Whenever people start lashing out at him, I go, 'It's like hating a child.' His soul has the same purity as a baby's."

A FEW HOURS after being hustled off the front lawn of the house that he'd claimed belonged to him, we meet Bob in the lobby of the hotel where *Blender* is staying. His arms are filled with cardboard boxes overflowing with papers.

"I make a Christmas compilation each year that I send out to about 150 of my friends," he explains. "I like to do handwritten liner notes about each song, and I have a friend at Kinko's who gives me a deal on making copies of them."

He begins to animatedly outline the unwieldy process of putting together the compilation from CDs, records and old 45s, packaging it and mailing it off. As he details how he chose each song, he waves his hands around, jabbing his finger in the air to emphasize a particular point. At the mention of each artist's name, his face lights up. Suddenly, he pulls out his cell phone and glances at the clock. He lets out a small gasp: In all his excitement about the seasonal mail-out, he's nearly forgotten something more important.

"We better leave if we're going to catch Ralph Stanley," he says. "The show starts in less than half an hour." [BLENDER]

TIME SUCKERS

Überfan Beatle Bob says he has attended a rock show every night for the past 11 years. Here are some other ways he could have whiled away those hours *Ben Mitchell*

* * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * *

1) Watch all 210 episodes of *Everybody Loves Raymond* 99 times

2) Sequentially hard-boil 80,340 eggs

3) Make the 40 Spider-Man suits required for *Spider-Man*

4) Listen to the Beatles' 12 studio albums 983 times each

5) Enjoy 173,188 rides on Space Mountain at Disney's Magic Kingdom

6) Do the combined jail time of Tommy Lee, Christian Slater and Martha Stewart

7) Have sex for the national average duration of 35 minutes (including foreplay) 13,772 times

8) Take the elevator to the 103rd floor Skydeck of the Chicago Sears Tower and return to ground level 206,588 times

9) Burn 441,870 calories just by sleeping

10) Travel to Mars

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SPACE

MUSIC PLAYERS

A SLACK TIME

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B MATH ROCK

Philips's **GOGEAR SA6145** boasts FullSound, an algorithm that improves audio signals before they reach your ears. It's serious math-geek stuff, but here are some numbers you can comprehend: The device has 4 GB of storage and a 3.5-inch screen for all your audio (plays for 16 hours) and video (plays for four hours) needs. $150; *philips.com*

A

B

C SMALL WONDER

It's tiny and stylish. It clips to your belt. It's ideal for the gym. While the **SANDISK SANSA CLIP** sounds a lot like the iPod Shuffle—and costs the same—it boasts 4 GB of storage (three more than the Shuffle), an FM tuner and an OLED color screen that actually lets you see and select your songs. $80; *sandisk.com*

C

PROP STYLING: ISE WHITE.

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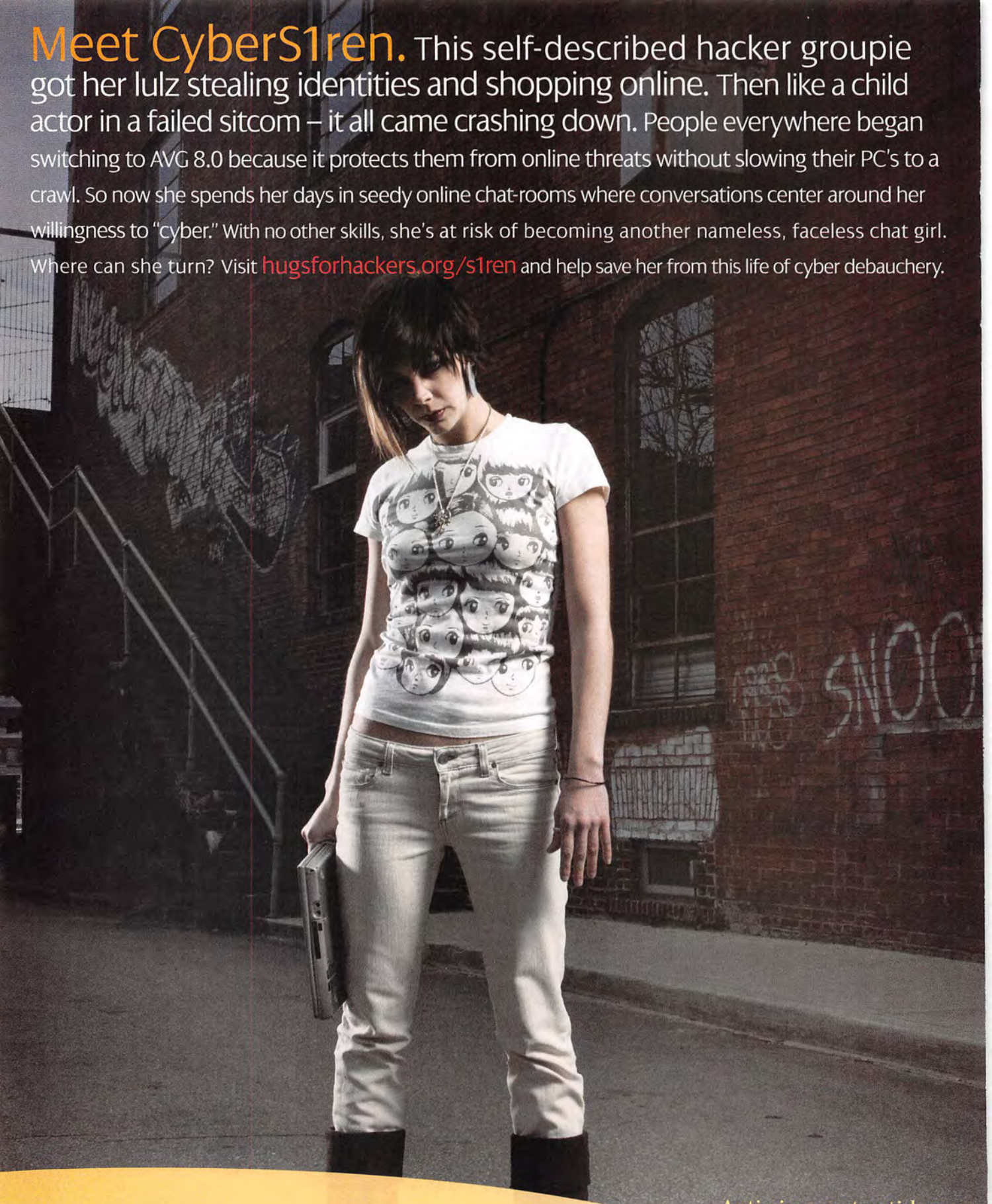

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GNARLS BARKLEY
Pain! Loneliness! Mental illness! Cee-Lo and Danger Mouse's new disc is R&B for wrist-cutters.
✪✪✪✪

MICHAEL JACKSON
Before the term *wacko* got affixed to his name, Jacko released the genius *Thriller*. Does it still thrill?
✪✪✪✪

MESHUGGAH
They have metal's best drummer. And now, he seems to be running the band. Bad idea!
✪✪

THE GUIDE

THEY MAKE 'EM. WE REVIEW 'EM

"Hey, dude, you're sitting on my cravat!"

FEELIN' FAB

Guess who's been listening to classic rock! (*By* JONAH WEINER)

PANIC AT THE DISCO

PRETTY. ODD. ✪✪✪½

DECAYDANCE/FUELED BY RAMEN

KIDS GROW UP so fast these days. One day, they're toddling in their Huggies; next thing you know, they've got beards and they're getting over their guyliner phase. Panic at the Disco—who recently dropped the exclamation point from their name, disowning it like a nose ring they'd outgrown—wrote much of their 2005 debut, *A Fever You Can't Sweat Out*, in high school. Their adolescence showed not only in their baby faces but in their Max-Fischer-Player–size ambitions: No song was complete without four movements, 4,000 syllables and references to punk rock as well as cabaret; no outfit was right without an Oscar Wilde–worthy heaping of frills and waistcoats; and no performance was over until dominatrix mimes and fire-breathing stilt-walkers had crowded the stage. Now that Panic are in their 20s, this second album arrives with some sober advance notice: They recently discovered the Beatles, they say, and in the bargain, maturity. Gone are the endless song titles; gone are lyrics stinky with 10-shilling words even the *V for Vendetta* dude would be embarrassed to say; gone, thank >>

GNARLS BARKLEY: JOHN RICARD/RETNA; JACKSON: MJJ PRODUCTIONS; MESHUGGAH: MICKE SANDSTRÖM; PANIC AT THE DISCO: JENNIFER TZAR.

God, are the emo-rooster hairdos.

Lesser Beatlemaniacs ape the naiveté and the jangling guitars and stop there. Panic at the Disco—helmed by singer Brendon Urie and guitarist-wordsmith Ryan Ross—act like they're romping through a wax museum. Or through Las Vegas, the band's hometown: Listening to *Pretty. Odd.* feels like a giddy stroll down the Strip, past the Eiffel Tower, the Statue of Liberty and all the other facsimile landmarks. Look, there's the Mellotron from "Strawberry Fields Forever"! There's the cacophonous climax from "A Day in the Life"! There's the galloping beat from "Get Back"! The sights keep coming—fake, plastic, diminished, exciting—as the band hopscotches from *Revolver* to *Let It Be*. Some kids discover the Beatles through their parents' vinyl; some get wise during freshman year. Panic at the Disco's indoctrination seems to have started with the Oasis discography and culminated in row AA at Cirque du Soleil's *LOVE* revue.

Well, what's wrong with that? Panic's cherry-picking yields several good songs, and a few that brush up against greatness. The best are the most freewheeling: The jaunty "Nine in the Afternoon" celebrates a druggy, time-bending state of happiness, with unexpected little rhythmic shifts adding to the off-kilter vibe. On "That Green Gentlemen," bells chime and spry riffs intertwine as Urie sings about giving in to exhilarating, terrifying change. And he does so succinctly: On Panic's word-driven debut, Urie worked hard to give meter and melody to Ross's labored verse. Here, attempting a *Sgt. Pepper*-style surrealism, Ross has pruned his scribblings (perhaps thanks to a nudge from *Blender*, which last year named him one of rock's 40 worst lyricists). At best, his words are evocative ciphers. Sometimes, they're sub-"Lucy in the Sky With Diamonds" BS ("When the sun found the moon, she was drinking tea/ In a garden under the green umbrella trees"). Mostly, they're pleasant nonsense. Set against the '60s references, though, Urie—a chronic over-enunciator whose nasally singing oozes emo—can stick out. Often it's as though the band has donned spotless Fab Four suits but forgotten to zip their flies.

Why does decades-old music prove so alluring to these poster boys of rock's MySpace generation? They got signed after uploading demos to a message board, for blog's sake. (The Beatles did not.) From their Charles Dickens verbiage to their Victorian-gent get-ups, though, Panic have always romanticized the past. The myth of rock's golden age—in particular, the aura of '60s universality and timelessness—probably appeals to these nostalgic residents of the digitalized, fragmented present. What saves them from retro tedium is their sense of play. When pop acts talk about "maturing," it usually means "realizing that your middle-school fans are no longer in middle school." Rock's reigning maturity kings are Green Day, whose ascension from jerk-off pranksters to arena-punk pundits set the template for similar makeovers from blink-182, My Chemical Romance and the Killers. To Panic's credit, their "mature" album turns this trend on its head: The band began at a stratospheric level of pretension. Here, they've relaxed, shed their grandiosity and learned how to goof around.

Download "Nine in the Afternoon," "That Green Gentlemen"

PANIC'S IPOD

Ryan Ross names the Woodstock rock that bewitched him while making *Pretty. Odd.* *By* ELIZABETH GOODMAN

THE BEATLES
THE WHITE ALBUM
CAPITOL, 1968

"The Beatles really went for it. They didn't care—they wrote crazy songs. Like 'Rocky Raccoon.' What was that? You got a sense they were having fun, which really inspired me. We used to make up silly things but not release them. Now we're starting to."

BOB DYLAN
BLONDE ON BLONDE
COLUMBIA, 1966

"I played that song 'I Want You' over and over. The thing about a lot of Dylan songs is, you don't understand some of what he's saying, but you kind of feel like you get it by the end of the song. He's so clever. And it stands up 40 years later."

THE WHO
THE WHO SELL OUT
DECCA, 1967

"They had some crazy ideas that these days nobody would try. They have a song about Heinz baked beans! It's kind of crazy that a band can write 'Baba O'Riley' and a song about beans. There's something really likable about that."

THE SCORE

✪✪✪✪✪	CLASSIC
✪✪✪✪	GREAT
✪✪✪	GOOD
✪✪	MEDIOCRE
✪	FOUL

THE B-52S

FUNPLEX ✪✪✪

ASTRALWERKS

Zany '80s dance band returns, just as giddy and twice as loud

Back when they were new wave's hardest-rocking band, the B-52s threw down with such heady kitsch attitude that it took most of us a decade to process it. (B-movie, sci-fi, girl-group surf-rock about dance crazes and undersea life? Sure, *now* it's obvious.) The weird energy dissipated through the rainbow '90s; guitarist Ricky Wilson died of AIDS and the rest of the band found solace in shiny, happy, globally inclusive pop. On their first studio album in 16 years, the guitars are cranked to garage-level rawness, the long-missing Cindy Wilson is back sassing it up and the ultra-Caucasian, Paul Lynde *sprechstimme* of Fred Schneider comes with 30 percent more manic edge, redlining to the point of sometimes feeling forced. "Tentative—tentacles—are grabbing—me!" he raps. "We're makin' space love in ze-ro gra-vi-*tee*!" Best enjoyed in the privacy of home.

CHRIS NORRIS

Download "Pump," "Juliet of the Spirits"

THE BLACK KEYS

ATTACK & RELEASE ✪✪✪½

NONESUCH

Midwestern blues twosome teams with a hip-hop space case and freaks out

With their stripped-down and dirty take on the blues, the Black Keys always sounded like they came from another time. On the Akron, Ohio, duo's fifth album—planned as a collaboration with Ike Turner before his death last December—their music often sounds broadcast from another planet. Thank indie-minded hip-hop producer Danger Mouse (Gnarls Barkley, Gorillaz) for that; he fleshes out the band's bare-fisted approach, layering extra instruments—organ, banjo, flute (!)—over Dan Auerbach's scuzzy guitar and

Patrick Carney's pile-driver drums. Odd touches, from the choir that materializes halfway through "I Got Mine" to the sonar ping keeping time on "Oceans & Streams," add texture to these impressionistic tales of ramblin' and being done wrong, without ever sacrificing the Keys' raw power.

ALAN LIGHT

Download "I Got Mine," "Remember When (Side B)"

BLACK TIDE

LIGHT FROM ABOVE ✪✪½

INTERSCOPE

On their debut album, Miami metal teens play dress-up in their elders' leather pants

Gabriel Garcia may be 15, but he makes up in attitude what he lacks in facial hair: "Don't mess with me," he hollers early on. "I'm a shock wave ready to kill!" More accurately, he and his teenaged band are a nostalgia machine ready to evoke memories of '80s metal, with its furious chord changes and pop instincts. On tracks like "Show Me the Way," the hooks fly from every direction: "*whoa-ohhhh!*" backup vocals, Garcia and Alex Nunez's hot-rod guitars, random cowbell. But while devoting their young lives to assimilating the *Headbangers Ball* play list, they've neglected their own voice, awkwardly apparent in Garcia's unconvincing stabs at casting himself as a stud ("Let Me") and the commander of a mythical army ("Warriors of Time"). Sonically, these guys are a Harley, but lyrically, they've still got training wheels on.

TIM GRIERSON

Download "Shockwave"

THE BREEDERS

MOUNTAIN BATTLES ✪✪✪

4AD

'90s alt-rock heroes get way mellow, stay way weird

In the Pixies, Kim Deal was a comforting presence—cooing airily about true love and cosmic bliss, offering a beatific counterpoint to Black Francis's sadomasochistic shrieks. But her side project, the Breeders, proved she could freak it up with the best of them, harnessing hallucinatory imagery to oblong, mutilated pop rock—and not at the expense of radio play, as 1993's hit "Cannonball" proved. The band's fourth LP continues where 2002's *Title TK* left off: The skeletal, slackerly songs don't sound like they were written so much as sloughed off in an all-night session. The result is slight but often gorgeous, as Deal's wafting voice strikes upon melodies pretty and eerie. "I love no one! And no one loves me!" she cheers over the hypnotic bop of "Bang On." With her, a lullaby and a nightmare are never far apart.

JONAH WEINER

Download "Bang On," "We're Gonna Rise"

BRITISH SEA POWER

DO YOU LIKE ROCK MUSIC? ✪✪✪½

ROUGH TRADE/WORLD'S FAIR

Freaked-out English guys shake out the night chills

Do any bands make albums as poorly lit as British Sea Power's? The best song on the Brighton band's 2003 debut was a weepy booze ballad called "Blackout," and their 2005 follow-up had a tune about a tormented Antarctic ice shelf. Hitler Youth, Orwellian patriots and a lousy 2007 ("a pitch-black heaven") haunt album three, recorded partly in a derelict water tower and steeped in the political-apocalyptic side of new wave that produced Joy Division. Swoony singer-guitarist Yan's doom-Muppet voice hangs between a whisper and a shout, nearly lost in the lupine guitars, sad orphan choirs and goth orchestras. Things get almost crushingly heavy, but he fights through his nightmares like he's one spastic stab in the dark from flicking on a night light.

JON DOLAN

Download "No Lucifer," "Lights Out for Darker Skies"

CLIPSE

WE GOT IT 4 CHEAP VOL. 3 ✪✪✪½

RE-UP GANG

Virginia Beach bros are vicious, heartless ... pitiable?

ENJOY COKE!

Hip-hop lyric sheets abound with heartless fuckers, but Pusha T and Malice of Clipse are extreme: They are certainly the only rappers who've ever compared themselves to Rwanda's machete-wielding Hutu *genocidaires*. Beneath that noxious brag, there is a complex, if murky, moral vision. At their best, when Clipse rap about dealing coke, they don't merely celebrate it as a means to wealth, they describe it as a weapon they've wielded >>

GNARLY DUDES

R&B duo gets down—*really* down

GNARLS BARKLEY

THE ODD COUPLE ✪✪✪✪

DOWNTOWN/ATLANTIC

GNARLS BARKLEY'S SECOND CD starts and ends—like *St. Elsewhere*, their debut—with the ratcheting sound of a film projector: an analog artifact and a framing mechanism. Despite the album title and the duo's jokey way with costumes and pop-culture allusions, this flick is no comedy. The first single, "Run," warns, "Either you run right now, or you best get ready to die!" A verse of *la-las* doesn't blunt the anxiety.

Anyone who listened to *St. Elsewhere*—actually, anyone who listened to its ubiquitous single, "Crazy"—heard a compendium of desperate mental states. That album was manic; this one is depressive in all the right ways. The songs are in minor keys, the ambience is murky and Cee-Lo Green sings, usually, without a wink: desolate and bluesy or downright disturbed. "I got a whole lot of pain in me," he moans, believably, in "A Little Better."

Gnarls tap in to the lingering power of old soul music: the terse structures, the testifying vocals, the danceable beats and, especially, the full-fledged melodies so much current R&B has no use for. The music is built on vintage elements, but it's no revival. It's stranded, deliberately, between eras, as lost as the people in its songs.

Throughout, Green role-plays weirdos and lonely types. Even in the one facetious song, "Whatever," his bratty, nasal teenager isn't just a jerk—he's an emotional wreck. Meanwhile, Danger Mouse surrounds soul beats with the disoriented lounge music of old Ennio Morricone soundtracks—reverb guitar, odd bits of percussion, wordless backup choruses—and the skewed possibilities of spasmodic machine rhythms and filter effects. It's a pastiche, but Gnarls Barkley synthesize a genuine dread. If this is soul, it's soul for 21st-century sociopaths.

JON PARELES

Download "Run," "Surprise," "Who's Gonna Save My Soul"

Gnarls star in *My Big Fat Freak Wedding.*

GNARLS BARKLEY: JEREMY & CLAIRE WEISS.

"Voulez-vous étudier avec nous, ce soir?"

THE CD WE'RE TOTALLY GAY FOR

THE TEENAGERS

REALITY CHECK ✪✪✪✪

XL

Trés-cool twentysomethings with a healthy sense of humor and an even healthier libido

QUENTIN DELAFON IS a born romantic. The 26-year-old frontman for Paris blog heroes the Teenagers sings like he'd dry-hump you just as soon as look at you. He writes lusty propositions to Scarlett Johansson and takes dating advice from blink-182 songs. And when he kicks a girl out of bed, he makes sure to let her shower before she leaves. Thankfully, it's all an act, and a hilarious one—a satirical take on sex and adolescence, set to a soundtrack of shoe-gazey guitars and sweet, gushing synths, like the X-rated movie John Hughes never made. This pleasure-happy debut is Serge Gainsbourg by way of MySpace—full of '80s-baby references (*Dirty Dancing* make-out sessions, having sex to Mariah Carey's "Hero") and tongue-in-cheek odes to putting tongues in cheeks. It's one big, horny wink—halfway between charming and totally sleazy.

JOSH EELLS

Download "Starlett Johansson," "Feeling Better," "Streets of Paris"

against their own people, with irreparable harm done to their own souls. As always with these two brothers—whom Rick Rubin recently signed to Columbia—the prevailing modes on this new mix tape are giddy malevolence and literary verve, as they wrap drug talk in dense layers of metaphor ("double up on birds like Noah in the flood"; "Sonny Bono the slopes until the reaper calls")—but when Malice calls himself a "hollow man" on the haunting "Emotionless," the floor drops out. Rarely in rap do self-love and self-loathing stand so close together.

JONAH WEINER

Download "20K Money Making Brothers on the Corner," "Show You How to Hustle"

COUNTING CROWS

SATURDAY NIGHTS & SUNDAY MORNINGS ✪✪✪

GEFFEN

Take it from this guy: Hollywood will eff you up

Say what you will about Adam Duritz—he's a navel-gazing, logorrheic wuss; he peaked with his debut 14 years ago; his hairdo resembles an unkempt bonsai tree—but ... well, there's not really a "but." The Counting Crows frontman is ripe for mockery—and no one likes hating Duritz more than Duritz. On the harder-rocking half of this bifurcated chronicle of rock-star excess, Duritz is nearly emo-esque in his self-loathing, as he yowls about regrettable BJs, months lost to booze and, on "1492," Italian "tranny whores." (Apparently unrelated to the BJs.) It's dark and combustible—and probably more enticing than he means it to sound. The disc's *Sunday Mornings* half, about the regrets that inevitably follow those kinds of nights, is more acoustic, quieter, reflective. But after the epic bender that precedes it, it's also just kind of a drag.

JOSH EELLS

Download "Hanging Tree," "Los Angeles"

DEL THE FUNKY HOMOSAPIEN

ELEVENTH HOUR ✪✪✪

DEF JUX

After a three-year delay, Ice Cube's cousin shows why he's become an enduring rapper

In the 17 years and half a lifetime since his infectious nonsense rap "Mistadobalina," Del the Funky Homosapien has been on "cruise control." So he boasts on his first album since 2000's well-respected *Both Sides of the Brain*. Rapper of choice on such prestige projects as the Handsome Boy Modeling School and Gorillaz' "Clint Eastwood," Del always exudes confidence and never swaggers: "They say I'm cold/But I told you/I got goals/I focus on the whole." Just as he claims, his calm articulation and clean beats never waver—where once he copped to vices and joked about dirty asses, now his "naked funk" is all about a craft that won't quit. That's impressive. But it's also limited. The point of cruise control is to arrive well rested. With Del, it's not clear he'll ever get out of the car.

ROBERT CHRISTGAU

Download "Last Hurrah," "Hold Your Hand"

ASTONISHING FACT!

In 1989 Mark Lanegan of The GUTTER TWINS was in a band called the Jury with future Nirvana member Kurt Cobain. They never released any material.

DESTROYER

TROUBLE IN DREAMS ✪✪✪

MERGE

Classy, abstract songs ... about getting really wasted

After the breakout success of his 2006 chamber-pop gem, *Destroyer's Rubies*, Vancouver's veteran indie bard Dan Bejar (a.k.a. Destroyer) is in "If it ain't broke, don't fix it" mode: He's made an album that sounds nearly identical to the one before it. Blues-flecked guitars continue to draw listless doodles, piano-bar fragments plink away and his practiced, Bowie-tinged warble rolls on. Mirroring the logical ellipses and coded images of dreams, Bejar's verse is more abstruse than ever; but as usual, the hallowed rock-trinity of drugs, alcohol and women lies just beneath the surface. The chorus of the cryptic opener, "Blue Flower/Blue Flame," floats Bejar's mission statement down a cascading guitar melody: "I'll tell you what I mean by that/Maybe not in seconds flat/Maybe not today." The album's finest moments—the sweet, stripped-down "Foam Hands," the pounding "Leopard of Honor"— are those where he takes his time.

ALEX BENENSON

Download "Foam Hands," "Leopard of Honor"

MIKE DOUGHTY

GOLDEN DELICIOUS ✪✪✪½

ATO

Gone-solo smarty veers away from his '90s NYC band to address pork and war

Soul Coughing's effects-bedecked avant-funk always made Mike Doughty's strange, smart, associative rants stranger and smarter. Fronting a competent funk-rock touring unit, he's Missy without Timbaland, Mick without the Stones. But he's also an excellent fit for ATO, Dave Matthews's adventurously roots-friendly label. Doughty's fourth and best solo album gives up two keepers: the semi-absurdist "More Bacon Than the Pan Can Handle," with Stephanie Bischoff's guest vocals sexier for sure than any synth weirdness Soul Coughing ever confabulated, and the mournfully understated Iraq opener, "Fort Hood." Elsewhere it lives up enjoyably to its greatest sound bite: "I strive to understand not to be understood." Note, however, that any guy who leans on the line "The moonlight shines like a luminous girl tonight" has plans the girl understands all too well.

ROBERT CHRISTGAU

Download "Fort Hood," "More Bacon Than the Pan Can Handle"

KATHLEEN EDWARDS

ASKING FOR FLOWERS ✪✪✪

ZOE/ROUNDER

Folk-circuit fave draws out her songs until they have stretch marks

Kathleen Edwards is an Ottawa singer-songwriter with a tough-minded lyrical flair, a reliable melodic knack and a smoky folkie voice alluring enough to take her just so far and no further. The title chorus on her third

TEENAGERS: BILLA.

Counting Crows: Man, Colonel Sanders got rasta!

and best album shows off all three gifts: "Asking for flowers/Is like asking you to be nice/Don't tell me you're too tired/For 10 years I been working nights." Backed by Sheryl Crow guitarist Greg Leisz and Tom Petty keyboardist Benmont Tench, it's killer, but built of such familiar musical materials that when it comes around the third time, it's plumb tuckered out. The track is one of three standouts that run over five minutes, and all three are too long. Edwards's niche market will never force her to break this habit. Too bad the rest of the world won't ever hear "The Cheapest Key," the strongest (and fastest) thing here, at a totally satisfying 2:42.

ROBERT CHRISTGAU

Download "The Cheapest Key," "Asking for Flowers"

THE GUTTER TWINS

SATURNALIA ✪✪✪

SUB POP

Brothers from another mother can't escape their sinning ways

Over the past 20 years, grunge-era survivors Greg Dulli, former frontman for the soul-inflected Afghan Whigs, and Mark Lanegan, raspy baritone for late psychedelic rockers the Screaming Trees, have recorded their share of songs about decadence and despair. United, they make for a compelling team of antiheroes: Gutter Twins powers activate! Shape of ... an inveterate sinner! Form of ... a haunted lowlife! Not surprisingly, their debut tends toward brooding, bluesy rock—a worthy soundtrack for those dark, whiskey-soaked nights of the soul and the regret-filled mornings after. Redemption is a recurring theme throughout, but the Twins know they're nowhere near Rapture-ready: "Heaven is quite a climb/From seven stories underground," Lanegan croons. By album's end, their shot at salvation seems ever more remote: Dulli chants, "We're gonna have some fun, son," and he sure isn't talking about Bible study.

MARK YARM

Download "Idle Hands," "All Misery/Flowers"

THE HEAVY

GREAT VENGEANCE AND FURIOUS FIRE ✪✪✪½

COUNTER/+I

The latest in U.K. gutter soul—Amy Winehouse would approve

"This is a man's world," James Brown blared back in 1966, "but it wouldn't be nothing without a woman or a girl." These British soul revivalists take plenty of their five-alarm-horn audacity from Brown's blueprint and, like the Godfather himself, they're largely at the mercy of the fairer sex. The quintet's debut LP often plays like a low-budget male companion piece to Amy Winehouse's throwback hit *Back to Black*: Lead singer Kelvin Swaby squeezes his Curtis Mayfield croon through Julian Casablancas's busted microphone as hip-hop-tinged maximum R&B heaves behind him. He warns of a shameless gold digger on "Coleen," only to wail about how she's "always fuckin' with my dignity" over an MC5-meets-Motown shake. The singer is hopeless but persistent—even after his woman woes lead him to murder on "Brukpocket's Lament," the spoken-word lark "Girl" finds him right back at it, wolf-whistling at a pair of loose hips.

RYAN DOMBAL

Download "Coleen," "That Kind of Man"

I LOVE THIS CD!
EVA LONGORIA

ALICIA KEYS
AS I AM

"I love her style, her voice, her rhythm, her beats, everything. I especially love how she can make a slow song simmer."

THE KILLS

MIDNIGHT BOOM ✪✪✪

DOMINO

Sullen, deviant blues-punkers could learn something from their BS-free guitars

C'mon, get happy, all you sourpuss art-punks! On their third album, the world's second-best coed lo-fi blues-rock duo (American woman VV and British man Hotel) are as sunny and merry as they're ever going to be, and that's not very sunny or merry. Besides kinky sex and romanticized self-mutilation, the Kills' >>

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EX model shown.

COUNTING CROWS: DANNY CLINCH; LONGORIA: GRAYLOCK/ABACA/NEWSCOM.

"We hail from the land of Satan (and state-sponsored health care)!"

METAL SCHOOL

Swedish doom kings play like they're being graded

MESHUGGAH

OBZEN ✪✪

NUCLEAR BLAST

MESHUGGAH MADE THEIR mighty reputation on polyrhythm; if you know anything about them, you know they like to superimpose one time signature on another. Their dexterity has graduated to a new level: Now the band produces almost no pleasure at all. Their sixth full-length album is an exercise in loud, complex and clinical riff-writing; the drums, bubbling away in fast and detailed patterns, are so intrusive that it's perilously close to drum-clinic music.

Around the time of *Chaosphere*, in 1998, Meshuggah had a bigger guitar sound and songs with a complicated groove, a kind of infinitely subdivided swing. Jens Kidman, the singer, had a little funk in his step, too: He made words bounce and syncopate.

With *obZen*, you're left with technical concerns. You may want to count the beats per measure and notice the shifting patterns. You may wonder how they juggle so many rhythms at once, especially drummer Tomas Haake. But the stiff, weirdly disengaged, single-note guitar solos and Kidman's monochromatic death screams *don't* make you want to keep dragging yourself through the record.

This is specialist's metal, with its own ideals of extreme technique and consistency. There's no point in looking for hooks or humor or variety. The words are boilerplate omni-loathing: "Salvation found in vomit and blood/Where depravation, lies, corruption/War and pain is God." Meshuggah achieve rhythmic virtuosity at the sake of everything else—what passes for melody, what passes for singing, what passes for lyrics or guitar soloing.

Live, they're still a band to be savored. When the guitarists and bassist interlock, the riffs pan back and forth across your ears. But here, the band's shortcomings seem suddenly pronounced, like a cartoon bodybuilder: neck like a paint can, biceps like watermelons, legs like matchsticks.

BEN RATLIFF

Download "Combustion"

favorite topic is the idle pursuit of trashy chic: "I'm bored of cheap and cheerful/I want expensive sadness." But don't tell their guitars that: Behind the pouts are riffs that could draw real blood and sharp, broken-down beats that in combination sound like a malfunctioning sampler chopping up Jack White. With stuttering electronics and a few strategic notes from an acoustic guitar, "Getting Down" is a dizzy, horny dance; the lyrics are faux-menacing boho nonsense, but if you turn it up loud enough it won't matter.

BEN SISARIO

Download "Cheap and Cheerful," "Getting Down"

LES AMAZONES DE GUINÉE

WAMATO ✪✪✪✪

STERNS AFRICA

Gun-toting West Africans make their first album in 25 years one to remember

Les Amazones de Guinée are a girl band with a difference—many differences. They're very much women, not girls—founded 46 years ago, they still include original members. Two of them play saxophone. They're literal warriors, like their Greek namesakes—officers and soldiers of the militia of Guinea, in a part of Africa that turns out penetrating voices like nowhere else. The interlock of two African drums, two electric guitars, bass-and-traps and those saxophones is captivating and propulsive. But it's the singers' foghorn pipes and knifelike timbres that seal the deal. At Juilliard, they'd call the sharp one a soprano, the growly one a mezzo and the mannish one an alto. But all three have too much earth and gravel to be contained by such polite categories. This is rough, beautiful stuff, and it satisfies.

ROBERT CHRISTGAU

Download "Mères d'Afrique," "Wamato"

LOS CAMPESINOS!

HOLD ON NOW, YOUNGSTER... ✪✪✪✪

ARTS & CRAFTS/WICHITA

Excitable U.K. brats bang a gong (and a xylophone and a piano and a glockenspiel and ...)

Los Campesinos! earn their exclamation point. This Welsh, self-professed "tweecore" septet is partial to rallying-cry boy-girl vocals, jittery crescendos and toddler-friendly xylophone plinks: Think Arcade Fire with a three-pack-a-day Sweet Tart habit. Thanks to a sneaky sense of emo self-awareness and shambling, expansive instrumentation, though, they avoid cute overload. Their songs enlarge tiny tribulations into fidgeting pale-kid anthems, as coleads Gareth and Aleksandra (no last names, thank you) discuss the impracticalities of sex in high heels and, later on, get to the bottom of *The Breakfast Club*'s existential implications. They aren't always chipper: "I'm taking far too many chances on these less than idealistic romances," Gareth grouses. But when lovesick failure sounds this giddy, who needs a soul mate?

RYAN DOMBAL

Download "You! Me! Dancing!," "Knee Deep at ATP," "Sweet Dreams, Sweet Cheeks"

SHELBY LYNNE

JUST A LITTLE LOVIN' ✪✪✪✪

LOST HIGHWAY

Early bid for make-out album of the year makes softness seem sinful

COVER GIRL

Dusty Springfield was a superhumanly nuanced British soul singer so driven by perfectionism and insecurity that she'd often record one syllable at a time. Shelby Lynne is a similarly expressive country crooner who rejected Nashville glitz in favor of increasingly stark, seemingly offhand naturalism. Here she takes on the Springfield songbook, replacing both the garish pop filigree of the '60s diva's London recordings and the Southern grit of *Dusty in Memphis* with bluesy boudoir jazz that's as intimate as pillow talk on stained sheets. Veteran producer Phil Ramone helps Lynne emphasize the loneliness of "You Don't Have to

I LOVE THIS CD!
ISLA FISHER

VARIOUS ARTISTS
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VALLEY

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MESHUGGAH: MICKE SANDSTRÖM; FISHER: KURT KREIGER/ALLSTAR/NEWSCOM

Say You Love Me" and linger in the sensual transgressions of "Breakfast in Bed" until this drastically rearranged but delicately rendered tribute feels like a candid self-portrait painted in watercolors and tears.

BARRY WALTERS

Download "Just a Little Lovin'," "You Don't Have to Say You Love Me," "Anyone Who Had a Heart"

STEPHEN MALKMUS & THE JICKS

REAL EMOTIONAL TRASH ✪✪✪

MATADOR

Indie-rock legend goes guitar crazy

Stephen Malkmus has a lot going for him: He fronted Pavement, the preeminent indie band of the '90s; he's got a stellar set of cheekbones for a cat in his 40s; and he can lay down a seven-minute guitar odyssey called "Hopscotch Willie" without seeming like a moss-headed wank druid. On his fourth and most expansive post-Pavement record, he gets something he's always needed: a monster drummer (his Portland, Oregon, neighbor Janet Weiss of Sleater-Kinney, a fellow paragon of brains and chops) to push him toward Valhalla, while keeping him on the sanity grid. His solos kiss the sky as he chomps dragonfly pies and battles with a witchy woman named Wicked Wanda. Even at his loopiest, the goal is wide-armed warmth—"gale-force intimacy," as he sings—not pompous whimsy. It's a very rare, wondrous thing: prog-rock for firesides and fuzzy-slipper Sundays.

JON DOLAN

Download "Dragonfly Pie," "Out of Reaches," "Baltimore"

MOBY

LAST NIGHT ✪✪½

MUTE

Techno king tries to find his inner club kid

Moby's 1999 breakthrough, *Play*, was ingenious not just for its pairing of sampled blues and slick techno but for the way it took the idea of ambient music literally: Turned into ad jingles and soundtrack filler, the songs became ubiquitous—they followed you. On his sixth studio album, Moby revisits the raved-up atmospherics of his 1991 hit "Go," joining recent albums by Daft Punk and Justice in looking back to an earlier era of spirited electronic music. But he lacks their wit or personality, and the album turns into a succession of flashy vocal cameos and samples: soul-diva hollering ("Everyday It's 1989"), French-chanteuse whispering ("Hyenas"), orgasmic disco moaning ("I'm in Love"), old-school rapping ("I Love to Move in Here"). Moby's propensity for making chic background music—his last album was called *Hotel*—flattens even the clubbiest tracks here.

DENNIS LIM

Download "Everyday It's 1989"

Stephen Malkmus & the Jicks: In Oregon, this is what celebrities look like.

THE MOUNTAIN GOATS

HERETIC PRIDE ✪✪✪

4AD

One of music's leading wordsmiths turns pulp to poetry

With drums, strings, pianos, amps and backup singers, this is the biggest-sounding record ever for a band that used to consist of one guy on acoustic guitar—which may make John Darnielle's throaty, science-teacher-on-a-bender voice easier for new listeners to hack, though in places the arrangements threaten to over- >>

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whelm him. Still, after several concept albums that bordered on memoir, the Mountain Goats' 15th LP is also a throwback to the strange-tale-anthology approach of his earlier, boom-box-recorded cassettes. Pulp-fiction and pop references abound (horror writers, monsters, cults, heavy-metal lyrics) as characters in many of the songs succumb, willingly or not, to corruption. The mixture of corrupters and corruptees helps Darnielle explore the nature of evil without losing his sense of humor. Amid all the rot, though, any flash of naive humanity is wrenching, like the teenage runaway in "San Bernardino," pulling petals from his pocket to cast over his girlfriend as she gives birth in a motel bathtub. While Erik Friedlander's cello gently weeps, Darnielle cries out, "*Ilovedyousomuchjustthen*," in a rush that tells you how brief a time the young couple's peace is likely to last.

CARL WILSON

Download "Autoclave," "Lovecraft in Brooklyn"

PRIDE TIGER

THE LUCKY ONES ✪✪✪

CAROLINE

Canadian rockers trade pocket protectors for leather pants

Three of Pride Tiger's four members hail from metal's fantasy-dork wing—their former band, 3 Inches of Blood, actually has a song called "Destroy the Orcs." But on their latest project, Dungeonmaster incantations give way to cock-rock bravado as the band pays homage to Thin Lizzy, the '70s hard-rock heroes who brought us "The Boys Are Back in Town." Throughout, Pride Tiger reassemble their muses' chunky boogies and harmonized guitar licks; meanwhile, singer-drummer Matt Wood apes the barroom-raconteur style of Lizzy frontman Phil Lynott. A handful of tracks—the shuffling "Fill Me In," the swinging "What It Is"—work an assured swagger, but Wood never quite nails his role model's tomcat growl or sly nonchalance. Back to the 36-sided dice, fellas.

TOM BEAUJOUR

Download "What It Is," "Fill Me In"

RICK ROSS

TRILLA ✪✪✪

DEF JAM/SLIP-N-SLIDE

A hip-hop hulk who stacks cakes and pies (and cakes and pies)

Everything about Rick Ross is thick. The Miami bruiser has a belly like a competitive-eating champ and forearms the size of palm-tree trunks. He sports the bushiest dope-boy beard this side of Cutty from *The Wire*. And he delivers his boasts in a husky *basso profundo* that could flatten a speedboat. Ross first hit big with 2006's "Hustlin'" and has pulled his weight (wink!) on all-star mix-tape cuts like "We Takin' Over"—despite the fact that his chief lyrical asset is the way his name rhymes with *boss*. On album two, his focus switches from coke to cash as he booms about his fleet of Maybachs (on the soaring T-Pain synthfest "The Boss") and prepaying his baby daughter's college tuition. "Luxury Tax" even finds him griping about the size of his IRS payments. Mike Huckabee, get at him!

JOSH EELLS

Download "Speeding" feat. R. Kelly

SNOOP DOGG

EGO TRIPPIN' ✪✪✪

DOGGYSTYLE/GEFFEN

Snoop the comedian steps out! (Dave Chappelle need not worry)

From the raunchy cartoon cover of *Doggystyle* to the "Gin and Juice" video's *Home Alone* parody to the winningly absurd, short-lived sketch show *Doggy Fizzle Televizzle*, Snoop Dogg has always spiked his G-funk strut with a comedic streak. And on his lascivious single "Sensual Seduction"—with its brilliant, Prince-parodying, worn-out-VHS-style video—the Doggfather embraces his funnyman side, with plenty of kitschy Roger Troutman vocoder effects to boot. Alas, the West Coast stalwart's ninth album doesn't entirely make good on "Seduction"'s wacky promise. For every over-the-top funk send-up (like "Cool," where Snoop shows off a Chappellian Rick James impression), there's yet another toothless gangsta bromide (the Neptunes-produced "Sets Up").

THE CD WE DIDN'T EVEN UNWRAP

And the hick-hop abomination "Johnny Cash" is plenty humorous—but in a laughing-at, not laughing-with, sort of way.

RYAN DOMBAL

Download "Press Play," "Cool"

SWITCHES

LAY DOWN THE LAW ✪✪✪½

INTERSCOPE

British yobs wanna party like it's 1975

In light of all the mild-mannered Coldplay knockoffs of the last few years, it's easy to forget that British rockers used to be cocky young things, happy to bang out shout-along choruses filled with drug references. Switches remember; their debut LP sounds as if it were written with soccer stadiums in mind, complete with chirpy harmonies and hooks that broadcast singer Matt Bishop's ELO fixation. (Note to Jeff Lynne: Listen to "Stepkids in Love" and "Drama Queen" and contemplate a call to your lawyer.) But the quartet throws itself into these vintage gestures with so much verve and dumb-fun exuberance that the songs, even with their simplistic, catchphrase lyrics, are hard to resist. From the glammy pop of "Snakes & Ladders" to the standout "Killer Karma," they make the case for old-fashioned, smartly executed—and winning—bombast.

DAVID BROWNE

Download "Snakes & Ladders," "Killer Karma"

THESE NEW PURITANS

BEAT PYRAMID ✪✪✪½

DOMINO

A youthful mix of guitar noise, groove science and bad attitude

NOT REAL PURITANS

These four 20-ish rockers are practically a parody of a British buzz band: stuttering clatters and synth gurgles nicked from arcane electronic subgenres, dissonant guitars that coil and strike like cobras, a pair of photogenic twin brothers, connections to the fashion world and the delightful arrogance of youth. (The chorus of "C. 16th +": "And to history/We will say/We were right." So there!) Their favorite topic is futurism, even though this debut owes a big debt to 30-year-old albums by the Fall, an enduring and repetitious British band. TNP's self-satisfaction could be grating if it weren't usually merited; fortunately, they get bored easily. Frontman Jack Barnett's sneering declarations snap like a mix-tape rapper's flow, and most of their songs gallop by in a minute or two, erupting with new beats the moment they start to itch.

DOUGLAS WOLK

Download "En Papier," "Numbers (aka Numerology)"

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This pudgy pop whiz's debut is the freakiest R&B LP not released by a defendant.

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VAMPIRE WEEKEND
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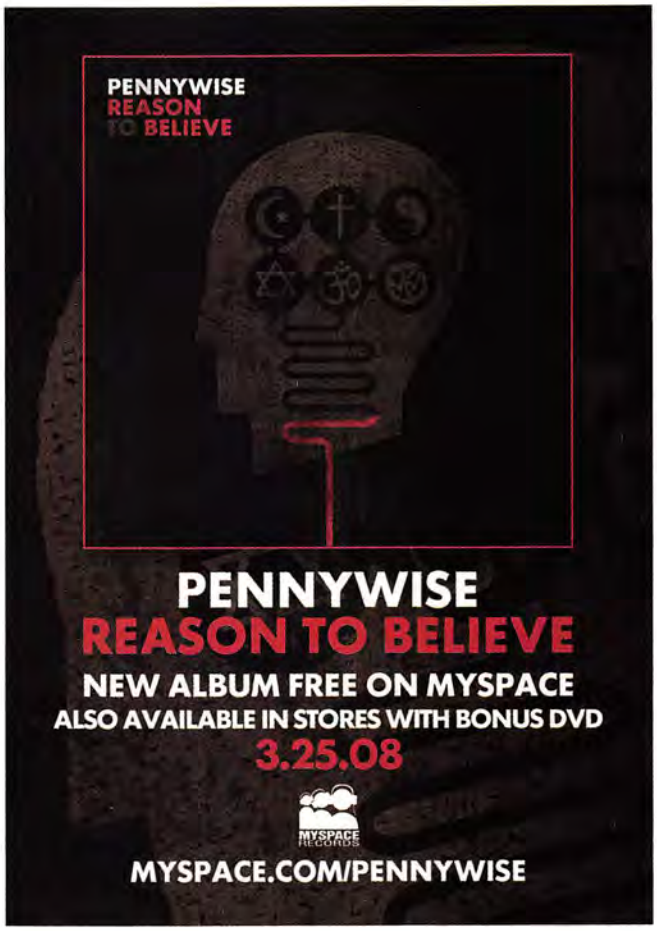

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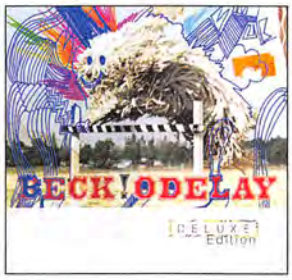

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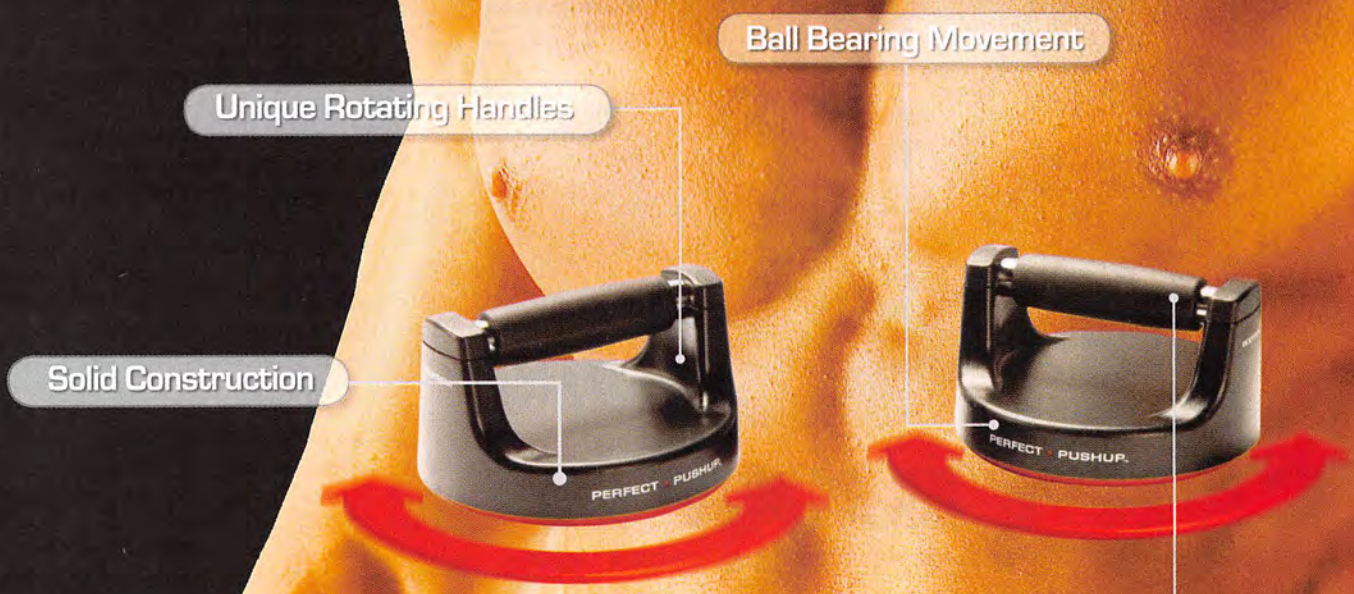

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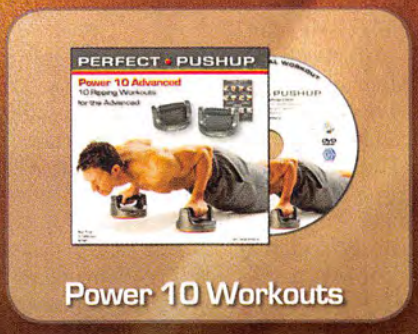

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"Why is it you want to be admitted to our boys' prep school, Mr. Jackson?"

CAN'T BEAT IT

A nervous former child star made this global juggernaut by loving *all* kinds of music *By* KELEFA SANNEH

MICHAEL JACKSON

THRILLER—25TH ANNIVERSARY EDITION ✪✪✪✪

EPIC/LEGACY

HOW DO YOU improve pop's biggest blockbuster? You don't.

It's been a quarter-century since Michael Jackson released *Thriller*. Or, as his record company is now pleased to call it on the front cover of a new reissue, "The World's Biggest Selling Album of All Time": That's 104 million copies worldwide. And it has taken 25 years for pop music to catch up.

Yes, it's genius. Also (not coincidentally) short; if a pop star released a nine-song album today, fans would demand their money back. But it feels longer than 40 minutes, partly because it's so weird. This is a profoundly quirky and omnivorous R&B mash-up, making room for hard-rock guitar (Eddie Van Halen's deliciously gaudy contribution to "Beat It") and soft-serve balladry (the silk-sheets masterstroke "Human Nature"). Though Jackson has a small, freaked-out voice, he stands tall in the face of zombies ("Thriller") and babymama drama ("Billie Jean").

Like many former child prodigies, Jackson has often seemed younger than he is. By the time of *Thriller*, he was 24 (the same age Kurt Cobain was when *Nevermind* came out), with five solo albums to his credit. Still, this was the one that really cut him loose from the Jackson 5 and turned him from an R&B sensation into a full-fledged pop celebrity.

Jackson and virtuoso producer Quincy Jones brought the whole R&B genre with them. In the years following, singers from Prince to Whitney Houston conquered the pop mainstream. And in this decade, young stars (some of whom weren't even born in 1982) have taken to flaunting MJ-isms: herky-jerky dance moves; sobbing, hiccupping vocals; high-fructose R&B hybrids. From Rihanna's "Umbrella" (with its rock & roll backbeat and clubby synthesizers) to R. Kelly's "Trapped in the Closet" (the weirdest music video since "Thriller"), from Usher to The-Dream, the sound and spirit of this album are everywhere.

So it's reissue time. *Thriller-25th Anniversary Edition* looks grand but feels a bit skimpy; it unveils precisely one (relatively lackluster) outtake, "For All Time," and no liner notes. (A bonus disc contains the groundbreaking music videos.) Still, it's hard to stay mad at any CD that includes these nine audacious songs.

Five remixes constitute the main draw—and the biggest risk. Fergie trades lines (why?) with Jackson in "Beat It 2008"; Kanye West adds new drums (why?) to "Billie Jean 2008"; will.i.am contributes beats (why?) and rhymes (why, oh, why?) to "The Girl Is Mine 2008" and "P.Y.T. (Pretty Young Thing) 2008." Only Akon proves equal to the task: His "Wanna Be Startin' Somethin' 2008" begins, shockingly, with a tinkling piano and some mildly smutty lyrics, and adds melancholy harmonies to tug the tune in a new direction.

As for the original tracks, most are so well known that it can be hard to hear them afresh. This is an album with only one deep cut, "The Lady in My Life," and even that is familiar—it was sampled in "Hey Lover," the hip-hop slow jam by LL Cool J and Boyz II Men.

But all of them reward close attention. For starters, there's the way "Wanna Be Startin' Somethin'" morphs from a playground chant ("I took my baby to the doctor ... ") to an anti-jealousy anthem ("You really can't make him hate her/So your tongue became a razor") to a social-responsibility lecture ("If you can't feed your baby/Then don't have a baby"). By the end, Jackson is paraphrasing not only Rev. Jesse Jackson ("I am someone") but also Manu Dibango, an Afropop star from Cameroon. (The song's famous chant, "*Ma ma se, ma ma sa, ma ma coo sa*," is adapted from Dibango's 1973 hit "Soul Makossa.") This ageless dance-floor killer—and crossover hit—is also a subtle black-pride anthem.

In light of what came after—more money, more problems, no more *Thriller*s—it's easy to focus on the album's paranoid streak. (In "Beat It," Jackson comes right out and sings it: "They're out to get you.") But though the disturbing stories and cruel jokes have tarnished his name, they haven't dampened the exuberance in his best jams. *Thriller* is as flabbergasting as ever. Or, to quote Kanye West's rap in its entirety: "Uh-huh. Y-y-yeah. Number one!"

Download "Human Nature," "P.Y.T. (Pretty Young Thing)," "Wanna Be Startin' Somethin'"

JACKSON: EPIC RECORDS/PHOTOFEST

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BUJU BANTON

INNA HEIGHTS 10TH ANNIVERSARY EDITION ✪✪✪✪

VP

A decade later, the Voice of Jamaica sounds as fresh as ever

When 21-year-old dancehall act Buju Banton underwent a Rastafarian conversion, fans lamented: Was this the end of his gruff, gravelly chat about bullets and sexy "batty riders"? Two other Banton albums—1995's *'Til Shiloh* and 1997's *Inna Heights*—assuaged the anxieties: He still chatted fiercely—not about girls and guns, but about poverty and politics—and now he sang, too, blurring the line between spiritual reggae and secular dancehall. Whether crooning Bible verses on "Destiny" or rattling a cappella about social inequity ("Circumstances"), he doesn't so much vocalize as emote, radiating intensity with every syllable. This reissue features three unreleased tunes, including a rapid-fire warning to gangstas ("Bad Boy") and a dulcet duet with soul-style reggae act Morgan Heritage ("Situations"), and a live-performance DVD showcasing Buju in his element: onstage in Jamaica, exhorting and electrifying.

BAZ DREISINGER

Download "Destiny," "Close One Yesterday," "Circumstances"

THE COASTERS

THERE'S A RIOT GOIN' ON: THE COASTERS ON ATCO ✪✪✪✪½

RHINO HANDMADE

Founded in L.A., this pack of jokers has endured far longer than more serious bands

The Coasters were the class clowns of '50s rock & roll. But they were also highly accomplished singers, and as masterminded by songwriter-producers Jerry Leiber and Mike Stoller, hits like "Searchin'," "Yakety Yak" and "Along Came Jones" were so tight, they crackled. This completist box is too much of a good thing—all of the disc-four rarities have superior original mixes. But not one of the 113 tracks will activate your remote—not even the pop standards they sang to prefab strings in 1960 or the R&B oldies they redefined after Leiber and Stoller withdrew—and "What About Us" and "Shoppin' for Clothes" shoulda been smashes. Devoid of doo-wop mawk or rockabilly menace, the Coasters had their own sound, based on Buddy Guy's wet, ribald baritone, Carl Gardner's equally theatrical tenor and Stoller's "alley" piano. But they found their market niche as a laugh machine. And today their comedy also documents the black and teen upheavals of the '50s, translating them into impeccable musical entertainment.

ROBERT CHRISTGAU

Download "Searchin'," "Yakety Yak," "What About Us"

Lee Hazlewood gets a little too into Arbor Day.

CYMANDE

RENEGADES OF FUNK ✪✪✪½

NEWHOUSE

The rare "rare grooves" relic with something to offer between the samples

As black Brits, the eight-piece Cymande (pronounced *sah-mahn-day*) were so out-of-the-blue in 1972 that what they called "Nyah-rock" was assumed to be part African. But Cymande were entirely Caribbean, split evenly between Jamaicans and Guyanese, with a mellow lead singer from St. Vincent. Guyanese bassist Steve Scipio defined a deep, laid-back thrum that tends toward roots reggae—"Zion I" especially makes clear that "Nyah" references the mutable Rastafarian buzzword *Nyabinghi*, which includes rarely heard drumming and chanting styles the band glancingly recalls. Embraced by such hip-hop beat miners as De La Soul and the Fugees as well as the rare-grooves set, their world-funk has gained character over time. Silly title aside, this well-designed collection sums Cymande up—the grooves on the accompanying collection *Promised Heights* are too rare, and chilly, for most of us. Instead, sink into the inspirational "Bra." Dance atop the conscious club hit "Brothers on the Slide." And then, surprise, find something to dig in almost every one of the 14 remaining tracks.

ROBERT CHRISTGAU

Download "Bra," "Fug"

BLENDER APPROVED

THE BEST REISSUES FROM THE PAST MONTHS

BECK
ODELAY
GEFFEN/UME

How a one-hit busker with a boom box became a 21st-century pop visionary. Now with bonus beats.

MARVIN GAYE
HERE, MY DEAR: EXPANDED EDITION
HIP-OSELECT

A bitter, eloquent love/hate letter from the Motown soul legend to the wife he'd just divorced.

THE EELS

MEET THE EELS: ESSENTIAL EELS VOLUME I (1996-2006) ✪✪✪½

USELESS TRINKETS ✪✪

GEFFEN

L.A. singer celebrates a 10-year bummer

Failure *is* an option. The Eels popped out of the breach opened by Beck's "Loser," and their main mood—quirky, smirky gloom—has never faltered. Across their 10-year commemorative best-of, the music is intimate, full of acoustic guitars and Hollywood soundtrack inflections. Lyrically, leader E (real name Mark Everett) is ironic, deadpan, miserable—think Randy Newman on Zoloft. If he didn't have himself around, E might have nothing to sing about. Any three songs make him sound like the smartest guy in the room; a whole CD starts to feel like a bad coffeehouse monologue. *Useless Trinkets* adds two CDs of rarities and a DVD. Spoiler alert: Live audiences do nothing to jostle E's troubles.

RJ SMITH

Download "Last Stop: This Town," "Saturday Morning"

LEE HAZLEWOOD

STRUNG OUT ON SOMETHING NEW: THE REPRISE RECORDINGS ✪✪✪

REPRISE/RHINO HANDMADE

Cult hero who made soft rock sound weird

"You like the obscure things," Lee Hazlewood gushed in 1999, as New York hipsters performed a concert tribute to him. "Those are the things I like." The producer-songwriter-crooner, who died last year, would have loved this collection: 55 tracks that sidestep his pop hits with Nancy Sinatra and Dean Martin in favor of willful oddities and schmaltzy subversions sung by himself and others. Three long-out-of-print LPs are here: *The N.S.V.I.P.s* ('64) pairs droll folk sing-alongs with outrageously surreal spoken intros; *Friday's Child* ('65) boings from fuzzy psychedelia to country hokum; and *Love and Other Crimes* ('68) predates the morning-after sensitivity of '70s soft rock. Hazlewood was no stranger to dreck, but more often, music-biz conventions inspired flashes of warped brilliance from him. With one drawled word—"*Hmmmm*"—he added homosexual overtones to Bobbie Gentry's "Ode to Billie Joe." Another hit, narrowly averted.

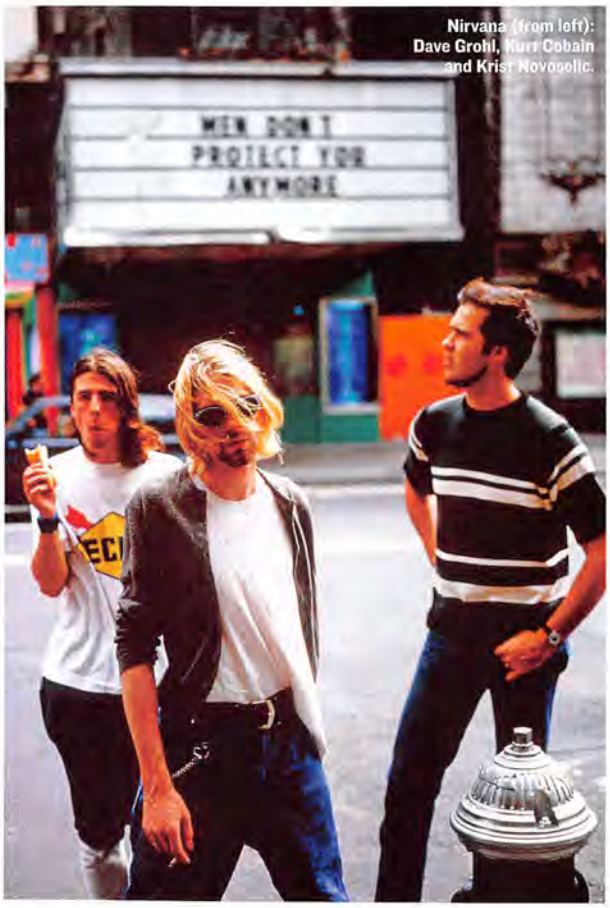
KAREN SCHOEMER

Download "Forget Marie," "Go Die Big City"

READ THOUSANDS OF REVIEWS AND MORE AT BLENDER.COM.

HAZLEWOOD: WENN/NEWSCOM.

NIRVANA



Nirvana (from left): Dave Grohl, Kurt Cobain and Krist Novoselic.

Kurt Cobain loved music but hated the music industry. That conflict raged for five years, until his 1994 suicide *By* DOUGLAS WOLK

EVERY ORIGINAL ALBUM REVIEWED

IT WAS A Cinderella story, at first. Nirvana, three scrappy idealists from Washington State's backwater "grunge" scene, eschewed the glamour and artifice of early-'90s music, made a stunningly great record and upended rock. Singer-guitarist Kurt Cobain, bassist Krist Novoselic and drummer Dave Grohl were genuine paid-their-dues punks and natural provocateurs; *Nevermind*, their second studio album, became the focal point of the alternative-rock revolution. For two and a half years, everything they did was front-page news—not least because Cobain was a heroin-addicted mess, torn between the fulfillment of his star-power dreams and his contempt for the machine he was fueling. Then midnight came: In early April 1994, as his band, his health and his heavily scrutinized marriage to Courtney Love were collapsing, Cobain killed himself. Six months later, Grohl reemerged as the singer-guitarist of his own hard-rock band, Foo Fighters (Novoselic declined an offer to join) and turned out to be a gifted songwriter and charismatic frontman. Foo Fighters have never been alpha wolves like Nirvana, but they've reliably generated hits for more than a decade.

ESSENTIAL

NEVERMIND

DGC, 1991

✪✪✪✪✪

In September 1991, Kurt Cobain was a homeless, near-unknown punk from a scene that defined itself as marginal. Four months later, Nirvana's second studio album hit No. 1, and the pop world was in shock. Was the secret ingredient their steel-fisted new drummer, Dave Grohl? Or producer Butch Vig and mixer Andy Wallace, who pulled a Charles Atlas bulk-up job on their sound? Was it *Seattle*? The culture industry they loved to taunt spent years trying to guess but missed the obvious answer: the tormented, scalding, brilliantly crafted songs. The crown jewel is still "Smells Like Teen Spirit," an apocalyptic denunciation of good times, graced with the god-king of all riffs.

Download "Smells Like Teen Spirit," "Lithium," "In Bloom"

IN UTERO

DGC, 1993

✪✪✪✪✪

Working title: *I Hate Myself and Want to Die*. Their third and final studio album is all warring impulses: masculine vs. feminine, the band's most vindictive noise-assaults vs. their most tender melodies, Cobain's remorse about what he perceived as having "sold out" vs. his craving for pop idolatry. Always obsessed with childhood, he now had a daughter of his own, and his lyrics are loaded with images of pregnancy and infancy; they also sound like a man cracking under unbearable pressure, and he howls as if the only way to survive his pain is to articulate it. Which meant that when he killed himself (after an abortive tour, an OD-induced coma and a final stab at detox), the elegiac closer, "All Apologies," written before *Nevermind*, was taken as his farewell.

Download "Frances Farmer Will Have Her Revenge on Seattle," "Heart-Shaped Box," "Serve the Servants"

GREAT

MTV UNPLUGGED IN NEW YORK

DGC, 1994

✪✪✪✪✪

Cobain tried to pull an entire subculture into his limelight, and this mostly acoustic gig, with original L.A. punk Pat Smear on guitar, focuses on loving, wrenching tributes to idols: folk-blues ghost Lead Belly, glam lord David Bowie and Arizona weirdos the Meat Puppets, who join in to play three of their own songs. Released seven months after Cobain's suicide, it topped the charts.

Download "Where Did You Sleep Last Night," "About a Girl," "All Apologies"

FOO FIGHTERS

FOO FIGHTERS

ROSWELL/CAPITOL, 1995

✪✪✪✪✪

No one suspected Nirvana's shaggy, quiet drummer would have a big career as a sexy, garrulous frontman—but Grohl went platinum with the first Foo Fighters album, recorded in a week, almost entirely solo. He'd learned much about songwriting (and screaming) from Cobain, and a lot of these supersaturated headbangers are, unsurprisingly, furious at an absent friend.

Download "I'll Stick Around," "Big Me," "Alone + Easy Target"

FOO FIGHTERS

THE COLOUR AND THE SHAPE

ROSWELL/CAPITOL, 1997

✪✪✪✪

Grohl assembled a touring group with Pat Smear and the rhythm section from emo band Sunny Day Real Estate (bassist Nate Mendel is still a Foo Fighter); this is their first "band" record, though Grohl played most of the drums. Recorded while his marriage was dissolving, it draws on arena rock as much as the apoplectic riff-thrash he can conjure at will. Its highlight, the volcanic love song "Everlong," is both at once. (The recent reissue adds nifty covers and B-sides.)

Download "Everlong," "Monkey Wrench"

NIRVANA: STEPHEN SWEET/REX FEATURES.

CHECK IT OUT

BLEACH
SUB POP, 1989

✪✪✪

Their debut album, made for $606.17 when they were just another bunch of longhairs who wore flannel because it was cheap and Seattle was cold. Without Grohl, the groove is pretty Neanderthal, but Cobain was already screaming his throat raw and hinting at his fondness for K-Tel tunefulness.

Download "About a Girl," "Negative Creep"

FOO FIGHTERS
IN YOUR HONOR
RCA, 2005

✪✪✪

The honor refers to presidential candidate John Kerry, on whose behalf Grohl campaigned, and the guests include John Paul Jones of Led Zeppelin and Norah Jones. On the electric disc, Foo Fighters fluctuate between genuine black-leather fervor and trying a little too hard to sound tough; on the soft-focus acoustic disc, Grohl presents himself as an aching romantic without actually revealing what he's emoting about, aside from the understated Cobain memorial "Friend of a Friend."

Download "Best of You," "Resolve"

FOO FIGHTERS
ECHOES, SILENCE, PATIENCE & GRACE
RCA, 2007

✪✪✪

Reunited with *Colour and the Shape* producer Gil Norton, they regained a lot of their idiosyncrasies, and "The Pretender" was a modern-rock No. 1 for more than four months. Grohl seems comfortable at last in his role as a solid, dependable rock star. If he's recycling dramatic moves here from his older records, that's because they still work. Message to the emo nation: "Cheer Up, Boys (Your Make Up Is Running)."

Download "Long Road to Ruin," "The Pretender"

BE CAREFUL

INCESTICIDE
DGC, 1992

✪✪✪

A slapdash collection of miscellany, assembled after *Nevermind* hit big. It's got a few fire-spitting songs (especially the anguished childhood flashback "Sliver"), sometimes obscured by indifferent recordings.

Download "Sliver," "Been a Son"

WITH THE LIGHTS OUT
DGC, 2004

✪✪✪

Three discs of music that never showed up on albums, plus an oddities DVD highlighted by the first-ever live performance of "Teen Spirit." This overloaded box is raw and erratic; the one-disc condensation, *Sliver*, omits the best stuff. But it's an insightful tour of Cobain's obsessions and development: Led Zep (three covers) and Lead Belly (four), ear-stabbing noise collages and pining, shivery solo tapes.

Download "Sappy," "Oh, the Guilt"

FOO FIGHTERS
THERE IS NOTHING LEFT TO LOSE
RCA, 1999

✪✪

As a trio of Grohl, Mendel and drummer Taylor Hawkins, they abruptly sounded like the Bush/Silverchair grunge lessers that followed Nirvana. Grohl's singing is buffed to an impersonal sheen even when he's howling at insincere people or declaring he's "going M.I.A."

Download "Learn to Fly"

FOO FIGHTERS
ONE BY ONE
RCA, 2002

✪✪

Odd: "All My Life" replaced Nirvana's "You Know You're Right" as a No. 1 rock-radio song. The rest is just stock phrases and generic arrangements. Grohl: "We rushed into it, and we rushed out of it."

Download "Low"

FROM THE MUDDY BANKS OF THE WISHKAH
DGC, 1996

✪✪

Pieced together from live tapes spanning 1989 to 1994, it's a sort of official bootleg—chunky and fierce, if not as freewheeling or levitational as Nirvana on a good night. The *Bleach*-era songs get a boost from Grohl's concussive drumming, but the later material doesn't gain much except crowd noise.

Download "School"

SWEET 75
SWEET 75
GEFFEN, 1997

✪

Since the end of Nirvana, Krist Novoselic has concentrated on political activism, but he's also played in a handful of forgettable bands, beginning with this trio, fronted by singer-bassist Yva Las Vegas (Novoselic played guitar). Their sole album, featuring guest appearances by '60s lite-jazz trumpeter Herb Alpert and R.E.M. guitarist Peter Buck, is mostly bland, lazily constructed alt-rock.

Download "La Vida"

FOO FIGHTERS
SKIN AND BONES
RCA, 2006

✪

This live, semi-acoustic album makes comparisons to Nirvana's *MTV Unplugged* inevitable. As pretty as these arrangements are, Grohl doesn't have Cobain's gravity or ferocity. Instead, he strings together clichés both musical and lyrical ("Let's go another round/I will follow you down and out"). One day, they'll release a terrific hits record. But on these remakes, they're just a fuzz-box away from John Mayer territory.

Download "Next Year"

FURTHER LISTENING

NIRVANA
DGC, 2002

✪✪✪

This straight-up greatest-hits is baited with Nirvana's blustering final recording (from January 1994), "You Know You're Right." Released to resolve a legal tussle between Cobain's bandmates and widow, it doesn't hold together like their studio albums do, but the songs bang like a string of firecrackers.

Download "Pennyroyal Tea," "Come as You Are"

PROBOT
PROBOT
SOUTHERN LORD, 2004

✪✪✪

It's Grohl's tribute to the metal bands he adored in the '80s, featuring frontmen from the likes of Voivod and Sepultura singing on tracks he wrote and recorded for them. A fun pastiche, and even if it won't replace anyone's copy of *Reign in Blood*, Grohl is clearly having a blast.

Download "Shake Your Blood," "Sweet Dreams"

FURTHER READING

HEAVIER THAN HEAVEN
BY CHARLES R. CROSS
HYPERION, 2001

✪✪✪✪

Written with the cooperation of Courtney Love and Krist Novoselic, this Cobain biography unsparingly picks apart his self-mythologizing lies and junkie self-deceptions. But Cross also traces the real emotional scars of Cobain's youth—and the ways they eventually split open.

Shine a Light director Martin Scorsese, clearly enjoying being the meat in a Rolling Stones sandwich.

ROCK OF AGES

Scorsese's *Shine a Light* pays tribute to the still-spry Rolling Stones

By DAVID FEAR

CRACK ALL THE geriatric jokes you want: Live, the Rolling Stones are still a force to be reckoned with. As evidence, there's **Shine a Light** (✪✪✪½), director Martin Scorsese's record of the Stones' vigorous two-night stand at New York's Beacon Theatre in honor of Bill Clinton's 60th birthday in the fall of 2006. Offstage (at least on film), it's a different story: The edgiest behavior we see the modern-day Stones engaging in is getting their pictures taken with the ex-president's mom.

Scorsese lets the performances do most of the talking. Keith Richards, who appears to have kept his wardrobe from *Pirates of the Caribbean 3*, slashes through songs he's played a million times like he's possessed by the (sympathetic) devil. Mick Jagger does his double-jointed dance moves as if the '70s never ended, and his duet with guest Jack White on "Loving Cup" demonstrates he can still belt out the blooze with the young turks. (The sight of the now 64-year-old singer grinding up against pop starlet Christina Aguilera, on the other hand, is just plain icky.)

It's disappointing, however, that *Shine a Light* ends up being merely a document of the Stones circa today. Scorsese is the man who made *The Last Waltz*, a hallmark 1978 rockumentary about the Band's final concert, which doubles as an epitaph for a musical era, and the revealing 2005 Bob Dylan portrait *No Direction Home*. But he's not interested in delving deep here. Other than including a few brief testimonials from the band members and a skimpy bit of old interview footage, the filmmaker simply, if kinetically, captures the group doing what they do. *Shine a Light*, however, feels a little too micromanaged, and the Stones come off as frustratingly tight-lipped. The film pales in comparison to 1970's *Gimme Shelter*, the Stones tour documentary that, even without its obvious drama—it features the onscreen stabbing death of a fan at the Altamont Speedway, the event that brought the Summer of Love to a crashing halt—gave us far more insight into the band. It's a shame, since no one is better suited than Scorsese to make the definitive Stones doc. (No director has used the Stones' raucous, turbulent tunes more effectively in his work.) At least the director got an above-average concert flick out of them.

Like the Stones, writer-director David

THE EXCITED-O-METER

We haven't seen 'em yet ... and we're not even sure we want to

VERY EXCITED
DOOMSDAY
An elite group of specialists battle creepy bad guys in a post-apocalyptic wasteland. Mad Max and "Snake" Plissken would be proud.

EXCITED-ISH
BABY MAMA

It's an *SNL* "Weekend Update" reunion when wannabe mom **TINA FEY** hires **AMY POEHLER** to have her baby.

NOT SO MUCH
PROM NIGHT
We want to dump a bucket of pig's blood on whomever decided to remake this second-tier '80s slasher flick.

SHINE A LIGHT: BRIGITTE LACOMBE. *DOOMSDAY*: JAY MAIDMENT. *BABY MAMA*: K.C. BAILEY; *PROM NIGHT*: SUZANNE TENNER.

Mamet is an old dog who isn't in the market for new tricks: He's perfectly happy falling back on his signature terse talk and testosterone-fueled philosophies. **Redbelt** (✪✪✪) takes place in the world of SoCal jujitsu academies, where a respected sensei (Chiwetel Ejiofor) is conned by folks running a corrupt Ultimate Fighting Championship-style tournament. This being Mamet, there's plenty of cryptic dialogue ("Maybe he learned it from the guy who learned it from the guy") that would sound laughable if the cast didn't deliver the lines with such clipped, rhythmic perfection. Things proceed smoothly until it all starts getting preachy (there are a lot of half-baked notions of personal purity bandied about), causing the movie to flip itself into submission. Still, *Redbelt*'s stoic refusal to give in to the usual go-the-distance clichés is the film's saving grace. And Tim Allen's performance as a sleazy movie star suggests he's finally found his true calling.

Tom McCarthy's **The Visitor** (✪✪✪), a character study of a closed-off college professor (Richard Jenkins) and some surprise house guests, like *Redbelt*, also revolves around one man fighting against a world gone mad. The film's tone, however, couldn't be more different from Mamet's hyper-masculine tale. This is a movie that wears its heart on its sleeve, especially once the academic and a young Arab (Haaz Sleiman) he finds illegally squatting in his apartment get sucked in to the nightmarish bureaucratic world of immigration services. McCarthy has a knack for finding a human pulse in offbeat narratives (see 2003's *The Station Agent*); though a few of the twists are a little too quirky, like when the protagonist goes from emotionally numb to joining his kid buddy in a Central Park drum circle in a blink. This sort of touchy-feeliness mars otherwise subtle storytelling.

Finally, something to ponder: Do producers get a package deal if they cast Woody Harrelson and Charlize Theron in a movie together? The actors are paired in not one but two new films: **Battle in Seattle** (✪✪), a fictional look at the 1999 World Trade Organization protests that turned the city into a war zone, and **Sleepwalking** (✪✪), a melodrama about a working-class mom, her preteen daughter and a healing road trip. Neither of the movies is very good—*Battle in Seattle* stages riots like dance sequences in a music video, while *Sleepwalking* is just another overwrought piece of backwoods miserablism—which makes us suspect that the usually talented Harrelson and Theron become the anti-Wonder Twins once they get together.

BLENDER APPROVED

Missed them in the theater? Catch them on DVD

THERE WILL BE BLOOD
Daniel Day-Lewis will drink your milkshake!

SWEENEY TODD: THE DEMON BARBER OF FLEET STREET
A razor-sharp Johnny Depp sings.

LAST GOOD MOVIE YOU SAW?

FERGIE

"**BEOWULF.** I'd never seen a 3-D movie before, and I was so impressed. The animated people look so lifelike. I couldn't believe how much action there was."

MUSIC DVDS

CIRCUS OF THE STAR

Xtina's Ringling Bros.-worthy blowout *By* RYAN DOMBAL

Aguilera: "You must be this undressed to enter this ride."

BACK TO BASICS: LIVE AND DOWN UNDER

(RCA)

✪✪✪½

CHRISTINA AGUILERA DOESN'T do subtlety. The scarily talented pop star's 2007 *Back to Basics* tour was anything but: The circus-themed shows featured trapeze artists, fire-twirlers and a dandy on stilts. On this live DVD from that tour, Aguilera pays tribute to heroes like Billie Holiday as only she can—belting out songs with abandon while wearing the most micro of skirts. Along with the star's performances of throwback tunes like "Candyman" come drastically revised versions of old smashes, including a ska-inspired take on "Dirrty" that finds the singer straddling a carousel horse. Behind-the-scenes interviews with dancers and costume designers (plus proud hubby Jordan Bratman) illuminate the magnitude of the production, but Aguilera delivers by making it all look absurdly easy.

THE BEST OF THE REST

BURN TO SHINE: SEATTLE, WA
(TRIXIE)
✪✪✪
Eddie Vedder squints, the Long Winters mug, Death Cab for Cutie frontman Ben Gibbard laments and Harvey Danger choose not to play "Flagpole Sitta" on the latest volume of the *Burn to Shine* series, which highlights performances in soon-to-be demolished houses. It's the circle of life, Pacific Northwest indie-rock style.

BUSTED CIRCUITS AND RINGING EARS
(MVD)
✪✪✪
Kurt Cobain loved hard-rocking Seattle iconoclasts TAD so much that on more than one occasion the Nirvana singer held a bucket for their bearlike frontman, Tad Doyle, to vomit in. Enjoy this and many other heartwarming tales about these lesser-known grunge troublemakers courtesy of this doting documentary.

THE TOMORROW SHOW WITH TOM SNYDER: JOHN, PAUL, TOM & RINGO
(SHOUT! FACTORY)
✪✪✪
Talk-show host Tom Snyder chats separately with every Beatle but George in this collection. The late Snyder's 1975 talk with John Lennon—the singer's last televised interview—proves the most engaging: Lennon opens up about the Beatles' heyday and his love of disco and groupies.

THERE WILL BE BLOOD: PARAMOUNT; SWEENEY TODD: LEAH GALLO; AGUILERA: KEVIN MAZUR/WIREIMAGE; FERGIE: TOM BRIGLIA/FILMMAGIC.

MLB 2K8: José Reyes gets the once-over from Hannibal Lecter.

GOD OF WAR: CHAINS OF OLYMPUS

BATTLEFIELD: BAD COMPANY

LET'S PLAY TWO!

A pair of realistic games dedicated to America's Pastime *By* LIBE GOAD

MLB 08 THE SHOW

SCEA; PS3

✪✪✪✪

MAJOR LEAGUE BASEBALL 2K8

2K SPORTS; XBOX 360, PS3

✪✪✪½

VIRTUAL JOY IN MUDVILLE

Spring is upon us, and with it come the latest versions of two baseball games: Sony's *MLB 08 The Show* and 2K's *Major League Baseball 2K8*. While these rival titles are very similar on the surface—both feature the same real-life teams and stadiums—they have decidedly different takes on America's Pastime.

In terms of game play, *MLB 2K8* hits a solid triple, thanks to some improvements on last year's edition, which made it far too easy to hit massive home runs and make miraculous catches. With a new push toward realism, both hitting and pitching are now controlled completely with the analog sticks; for example, curveballs require rotating the right stick around. The PS3-exclusive *The Show* ups the realism factor, as well: The game's computerized catchers use a database of actual MLB stats to call pitches—advice you, as the pitcher, can take or ignore. Practice also pays off; you get better at throwing specific pitches the more you use them.

The Show bests *MLB 2K8* in terms of animation and camera angles, while *MLB 2K8* triumphs when it comes to naturalistic controls and the nerd factor (you collect virtual baseball cards by completing in-game challenges). With both games, realism is at a premium—so much so, you half expect an embarrassing steroid scandal to break at any minute.

GOD OF WAR: CHAINS OF OLYMPUS

SCEA; PSP

✪✪✪✪

Despite being one of the most popular new video-game characters in years, surly Greek demigod Kratos hasn't appeared anywhere but on the outdated PS2, until now. He isn't making the jump to the PS3 just yet; this prequel is for the handheld PSP. Fortunately, the action—as Kratos, you dispatch enemies with a set of twin blades that can be whipped around on chains—is just as fun and fast-paced in this miniaturized version.

BATTLEFIELD: BAD COMPANY

EA; XBOX 360, PS3

✪✪✪½

The latest *Battlefield* game ditches the series' large-scale online multiplayer warfare in favor of a single-player adventure with a story line in which modern-day grunts chase down a gold-filled truck in Eastern Europe. There's little new here, aside from the game's destructible environments; try hiding behind a building and the bad guys just drive a tank through the wall—and right over you.

WORLD IN CONFLICT

SIERRA; XBOX 360

✪✪✪

Defend the USA circa 1980 from a Russian invasion in this alternate-reality strategy game. Use land and air units, and the occasional weapon of mass destruction, to make the world safe for Reaganomics once more!

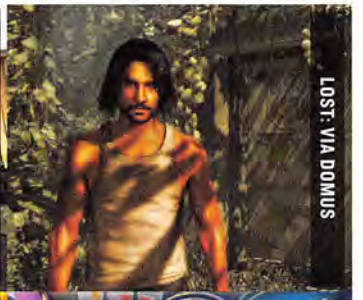
GIZMO OF THE MONTH

ALIENWARE AREA-51 M15X

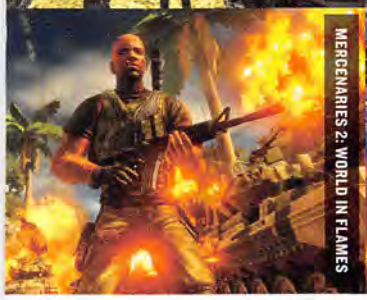
A pricey, extraterrestrial-themed rig for running those power-sucking PC games

The latest word in high-end gaming laptops is the Alienware Area-51 m15x, which sports a 15-inch screen and enough horsepower to tackle *Crysis*, *Unreal Tournament 3* and any other game likely to bring an everyday PC to a grinding halt. A fully tricked-out version with, say, new Intel Core 2 Duo Extreme Processors, an NVIDIA 8800M graphics card and an optional Blu-ray burner optical drive could run north of $3,000. Alienware's stylish design elements—the glowing alien head on the back of the lid, your choice of high-gloss silver or black finishes—will relay to everyone at the LAN party or coffee shop that you're the type of person who takes gaming or, um, word processing extremely seriously.

WORLD IN CONFLICT



LOST: VIA DOMUS



MERCENARIES 2: WORLD IN FLAMES

SEGA SUPERSTARS TENNIS

The clunky controls take getting used to, but it's worth it once you dominate an online pal with a well-placed atomic bomb.

MERCENARIES 2: WORLD IN FLAMES

EA; XBOX 360, PS3, PS2

✪✪½

A military madman takes control of Venezuela's oil supply, setting the globe on the brink of WWIII. You're one of three badass mercenaries who aim to take him down. Sadly, the real-life controversy the game has sparked—the Venezuelan government claims it encourages the overthrow of dictator Hugo Chavez—is far more entertaining than this generic shooter.

LOST: VIA DOMUS

UBISOFT; XBOX 360, PS3, PC

✪✪½

In this game based on the conspiracy-laden TV show, you're a peripheral character who lived through the crash of Oceanic flight 815. Interact with the other castaways, explore the accurately rendered but not terribly impressive-looking version of the island and solve clichéd puzzles. At least you finally get to see what's behind that magnetic wall in the Hatch.

SEGA SUPERSTARS TENNIS

SEGA; XBOX 360, PS3, Wii

✪✪✪

Who needs Roger Federer and the Williams sisters when you've got Sonic the Hedgehog and Tails, the fox? Iconic Sega characters face off against each other in this cartoonish tennis game, which features courts based on locations from classic Sega titles, and a series of wacky minigames. Hardcore Sega fans (all 10 of them) will love it, but the game's Wimbledon-on-acid approach is only novel for so long.

BLENDER APPROVED

THE BEST GAMES FROM THE PAST MONTHS

PATAPON

SCEA; PSP

Wage tribal warfare by mashing buttons to the drumbeat in this quirky rhythm-based game.

BURNOUT PARADISE

EA; XBOX 360, PS3

Speeding cars! Spectacular crashes! A perfect distillation of everything great about driving.

ANDERSON: ANDREW MACNAUGHTON

Anderson: hiding fingers 10 and 11.

GEEK FILES

FINGER ELEVEN

This month, SCOTT ANDERSON, lead singer of Canadian grunge rockers Finger Eleven, lets his dweeb flag fly

Last good game played *Tabula Rasa*, a sci-fi online role-playing game. My character is what's known as a "tank" in the nerd world; in battle, he's the guy in your group who runs in first and takes the most damage.

Tour-bus staple *Halo* gets pretty intense—it's hospitalized one of us. Our rhythm guitarist Rick's team lost the flag, so he punched a wall and broke his hand. We played that night's gig anyway—with his hand taped up, Rick had to learn how to play chords differently.

Gaming drug of choice When we play *Halo* on the bus, we've got connected systems at both ends. It's usually the stoners in the back and the alcoholics in the front. I'm in the front.

My alter ego On *World of Warcraft*, I play as a priest named Helio. My job is to make sure everybody's healed. It's a thankless job, but I get a giant bone from preventing somebody from dying.

Video-game crush Ms. Pac-Man. I'd have to say it's because of her lips—they're absolutely irresistible.

A Finger Eleven game would look like It would look exactly like the Journey video game from the '80s where you had to guide every member of the band to the gig. Except with pastier, more-Canadian faces superimposed over theirs.

Geek rating, on a scale of 1 to 10 Like a 72. I bought *Halo 3 Legendary Edition*, which comes with a big plastic replica of Master Chief's head. The game cost $130, and it pissed off my girlfriend—I tried to make the head the centerpiece of our dining-room table. *Mark Yarm*

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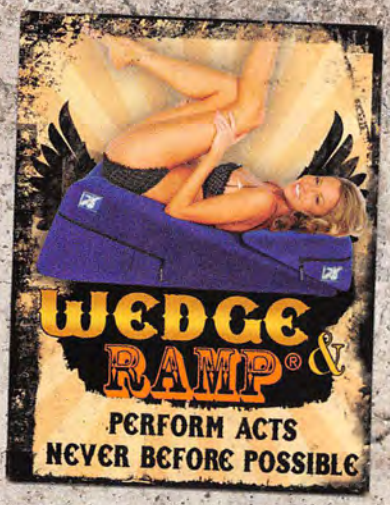

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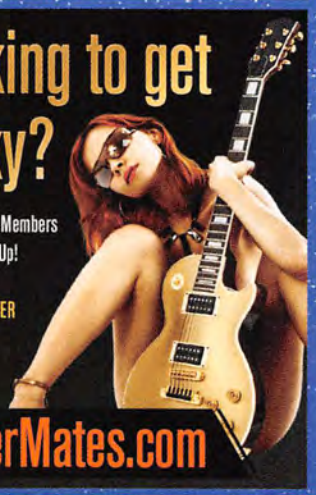

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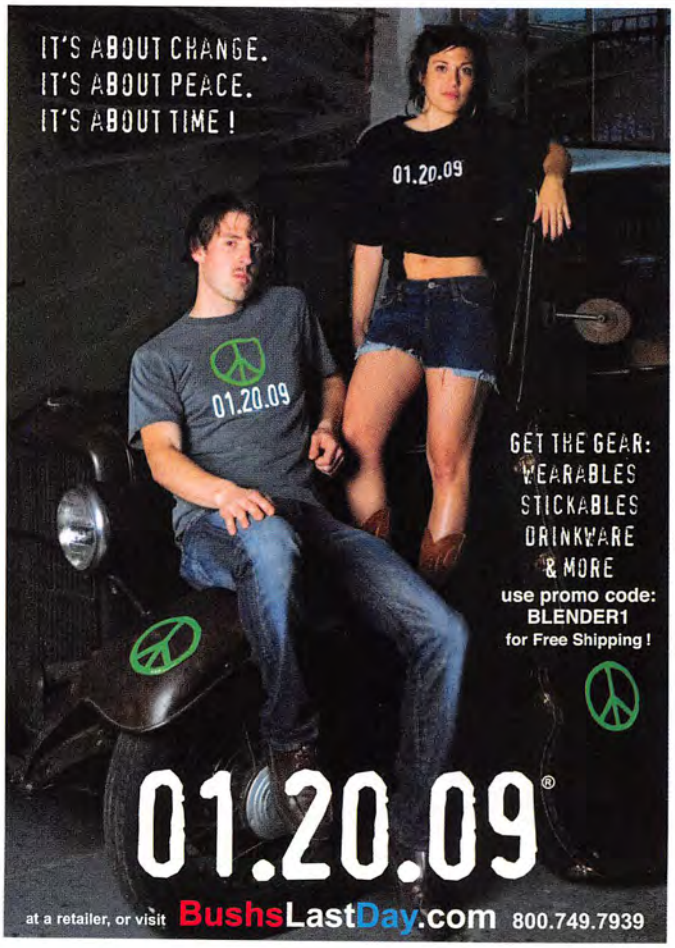
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WHO DOES ADAM DURITZ THINK HE IS?

By ROB TANNENBAUM *Photograph by* KYOKO HAMADA

Explain your self-portrait.
It's me, hanging myself on my own big mouth. There's a game of Hangman in which I can't get the U, which is typical of me: I only get to me, I never get to *you*. It says, WHY CAN'T I EVER J_ST SH_T THE F_CK _P?

How do you hang yourself?
I'm honest and forthcoming, and that doesn't go over well with some people. I'm an earnest guy. If you want irony or sarcasm, it's not really what you get from me.

What would your exes say about you?
Well, my mother wouldn't want to read this. But if you asked my girlfriends, they would tell you: "That boy loved to go down on me." And I am *damn* good at it.

Aside from that skill, Adam, will history remember you?
I didn't want to live and die invisible, and I'm not going to. I will have mattered to people. At 7 years old, I'd stand in front of the mirror with a tennis racket and sing "Can't Buy Me Love." It's a one-in-a-billion life. But I don't always like being me. There are other parts of this life my 7-year-old self wouldn't be thrilled with.

Like what?
I'm 43, single and I sit at home a lot. [Laughs.] That's not what I was supposed to accomplish in being a rock star. I wasn't supposed to mess this up quite so badly. And that annoys the shit out of people, the fact that I've done such a lousy job of being a rock star. It frustrates, angers and disgusts people. I can't blame them: It is a dream come true, so what the hell am I complaining about?

Why are you sitting home so much?
I don't relate to people very well. It's an area of my life where I'm immature, in the sense that I haven't had a lot of experience. I don't date very much.

Your apartment is pretty immature. It looks like Pee-Wee's Playhouse.
I'm a whimsical guy. I don't have any outdoor space, and I wanted some, so I put down AstroTurf and bought beach furniture. And a picnic table.

What are you like when you're drunk?
I'm occasionally mute: I had a date once where I could not think of anything to say for an hour. I sat there in my mind, going, *Say something*. It was a party, and I was holding a balloon. I must've looked like a 6-year-old.

Are you a bad boy or a good boy?
My parents taught me to be a good person, and my friends taught me to screw up. I've been a rock star. I have not led a G-rated life *whatsoever*. I've had a lot of vices. The tabloids got the story wrong: It was way worse, and way better, than they thought it was.

If we drug-tested you, what would we find?
An absolute fruit salad of medication.

Are you on antidepressants?
I'm not telling.

C'mon. Everyone's on antidepressants.
They are. I don't know what they're all so sad about.

Maybe they're listening to your music.
I thought my music would bum people out, but they're always telling me it helps them through times of trouble. And I think, *God, that's so damn depressing.* [BLENDER]

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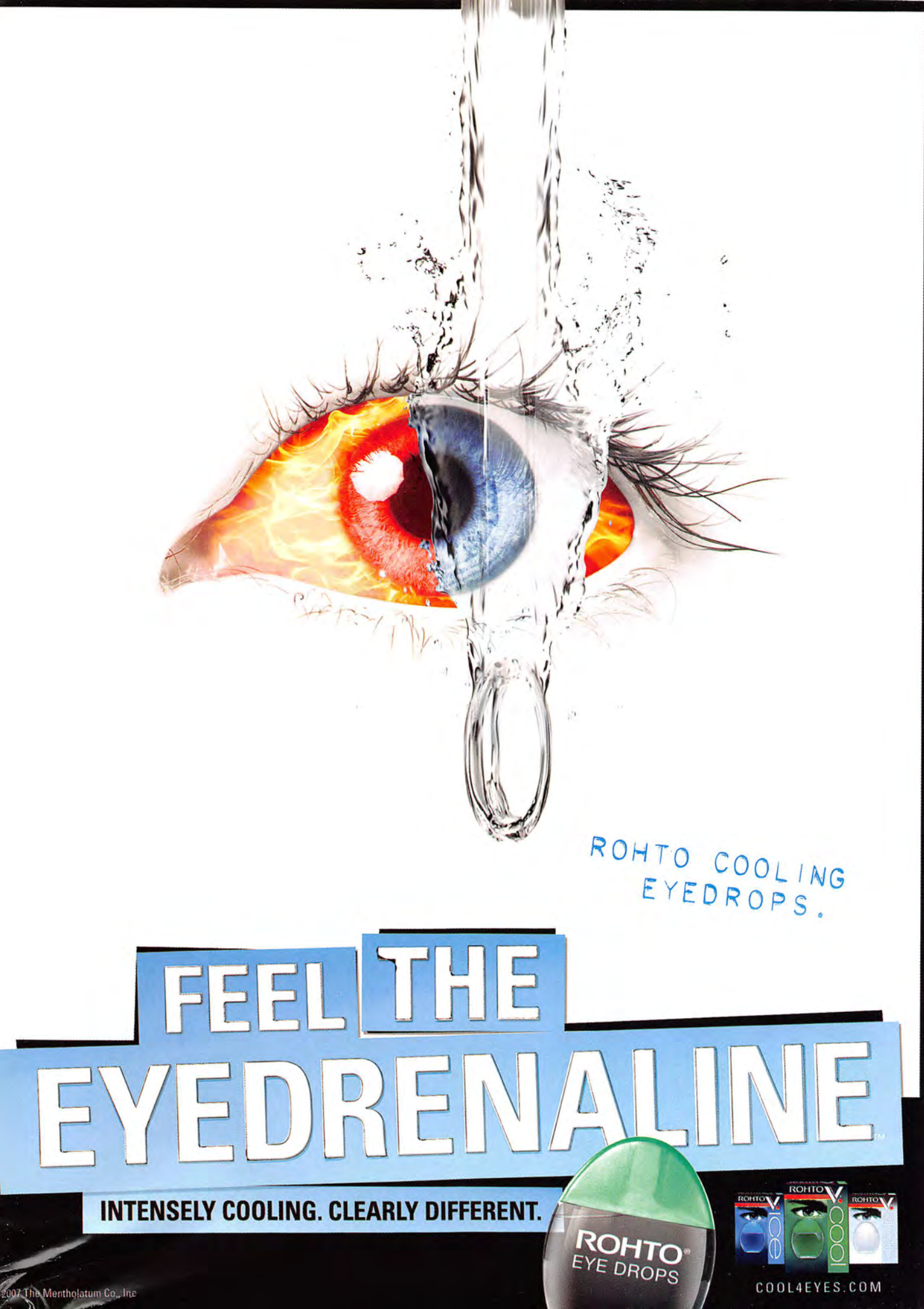
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